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BARDO
guideBOOK

chökyi nyima rinpoche

THE BARDO GUIDEBOOK

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THE BARDO GUIDEBOOK

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The Bardo Guidebook IS BASED ON A TRANSLATION OF TSELE NATSOK RANGDRÖL'S
Mirror of Mindfulness.

This book is dedicated to the memory of my mother, Kunzang Dechen, whose life and death were an inspiration to us all. It is my sincere wish that the reader takes to heart the precious teachings presented herein and uses them to attain liberation.

Chökyi Nyima Rinpoche

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EDITOR'S PREFACE

Following the advice of His Holiness Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, Tulku Chökyi Nyima Rinpoche agreed to teach on *The Mirror of Mindfulness*, a classic text on the four bardos by Tsele Natsok Rangdröl, a master of the Practice Lineage of Vajrayana Buddhism.¹ Rinpoche offered a series of ten talks during the 1987 autumn seminar at Rangjung Yeshe Institute, Boudhanath, Nepal. During that precious time, everyone present was impressed by the profundity of the subject and the insightful brilliance of Rinpoche's presentation. Inspired by the richness of the material, many students helped in transcribing the talks. Later, the English translation was carefully checked against the original Tibetan oral teachings. Seven months after the seminar, those of us involved in the project became painfully aware of the significance of our work following the tragic death of our dear friend Gilda Goldman. No longer were 'the stories of the bardo' a distant tale: we understood that these experiences await unexpectedly every individual.

Motivated by our sense of loss and the desire to help other people, we redoubled our efforts. What followed was a careful condensation and selection of the most pertinent material. Tulku Chökyi Nyima

1. Rangdröl, Tsele Natsok, *The Mirror of Mindfulness*, Shambhala Publications, Boston and Shaftesbury, 1989.

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often stated that he wanted these teachings to be a practical guidebook, easily applicable. We hope we have succeeded in offering such a guidebook. I would like to extend my thanks first to Erik Pema Kunsang for translating and carefully checking the manuscript, to the transcribers, particularly Marilyn Montgomery and Elizabeth, to Tara, who helped check tapes, to Kathy Morris for editing the rough manuscript, to Mim Coulstock for fine editing, to Kerry Moran for copy editing, to Phinjo Sherpa for entering the corrections, to Abraham Zablocki for proofreading and of course to Chökyi Nyima Rinpoche for making it all possible.

Marcia Schmidt
Nagi Gompa
June 20, 1990

FOREWORD

For the moment of death, there is an instruction described as a child jumping onto his mother's lap. A child recognizes his mother and without any doubt jumps straight onto her lap. 'The child without doubt' is an analogy for a person who has received oral instructions on *Trekchö* or Mahamudra from a qualified master and has recognized 'his mother', primordial purity. The uncompounded essence of the present consciousness, free from mental constructs, is the empty luminosity of primordial purity. When dying we should recognize this empty essence. The one who recognizes such a state of empty awareness at the moment of death attains enlightenment in dharmakaya.

Our body was initially produced through causes and circumstances, namely, the white and red elements from our father and mother. Within our body is the central channel called *avadhuti*, that is like a pillar within a house. At the upper part of the central channel dwells the white 'bindu' or essence inherited from our father. It has the nature of the letter HANG, white and blissful to the touch. At the lower part of this channel is the red element obtained from our mother. The red element is located at the juncture of the three nadis, four fingers below the navel. Its shape is called *atung*, meaning flame-shaped. It is

red in color and hot like fire. Between them is the life-wind, the life-prana, that keeps these two essences from meeting. When the last breath is expired and the life-wind ceases, then the white and red elements meet in the middle of the heart. During this process three experiences occur.

The first experience is called 'whiteness' and takes place when the letter HANG, the white element from our father, slowly descends. That experience is like the white moon slowly sinking in the sky. Then from below the navel the red element from our mother ascends like a sun. This experience is called 'redness' and is red like the rising sun. When these two essential elements meet at the level of the heart, the experience is like the meeting of the sky and earth. This experience of blackness is the moment when a normal person falls unconscious.

During the white experience the thirty-three thought states caused by anger cease. During the red experience the forty thought states caused by passion cease. When the two essences meet, the seven thought states caused by stupidity cease. It is said that when the black experience occurs, normal people and inexperienced practitioners will faint and remain oblivious in the state of the all-ground. At that moment they become unconscious with tears streaming from their eyes; all the eighty kinds of thought states have completely ceased.

Someone who has not received instructions on how to recognize mind essence falls unconscious for three and a half days. After this period it is as if the sky and the earth again separate. When awakening, the consciousness can leave the body either through the top of the head, the five sense organs, or through the lower openings of the body. If it leaves through

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the lower part of the body one goes to the lower realms.

When the consciousness leaves the body the deceased feels confused and thinks, "What shall I do now?" "Am I alive or dead?" The spirit will go to its former home, to its family or to its father and mother. The spirit of the deceased will pat them on the shoulder and say "Don't cry, I am not dead, I am right here," but they will not hear anything. Finally the dead person will become panic-stricken and realize "Oh! I am dead."

When the spirit of the deceased walks on sand he doesn't leave footprints. The dead person can freely traverse through solid matter and may think: "Before I could not pass through walls. What has happened to my body?" The body we have at this time is an illusory body, the same body we feel we possess while dreaming; an imagined body. Of the five aggregates, the aggregate of form is absent but the other four aggregates of sensation, perception, conception and consciousness are still present, connected to a mental body.

Because of the force of conceptual thinking, also known as the karmic wind, the spirit is unable to remain still for even an instant. It constantly moves around. At this time there are the six kinds of uncertainties. The dwelling place is uncertain, the support is uncertain and behavior is uncertain. Food is uncertain, and one lives on different smells and odors. Companionship is uncertain and experiences are uncertain; one floats about like a feather moved by the wind.

In this state, one is threatened by the three abysses corresponding to the three mind poisons. There is the pitch-black abyss of stupidity, the deep

abyss of aggression and the vast abyss of desire. Also at this time one hears loud sounds caused by the four elements of earth, water, fire and wind. There is the sound of an avalanche continuously falling behind one, the sound of a great rushing river, the sound of a huge blazing mass of fire like a volcano and the sound of a great storm. Moreover, there is no perception of the sun and moon, which can only be seen when we have a physical body. For forty-nine days there is neither night nor day. These are some of the experiences we undergo.

To reiterate, according to our master's instructions, we should recognize our nature as primordial purity and maintain awareness free from the thoughts of the three times. In the moment of recognizing awareness not a single one of the 84,000 negative emotions is present. To recognize awareness during the three experiences, the whiteness, redness and blackness, when all the emotions have completely ceased, makes it possible to attain stability in the state of primordial purity. Sentient beings who do not recognize mind nature fall unconscious, whereas those who do recognize mind nature and have practiced do not faint. The moment of the three experiences is the time to apply the teaching of the child jumping onto his mother's lap. The awareness that our teacher pointed out is like the child. The primordial purity itself, the basic luminosity, is like the mother. This recognition at the very moment of death, in the bardo of dying, will ensure liberation.

After the dissolution of the five elements and the three experiences of appearance, increase and attainment, the unfolding of the bardo of dharmata begins with what is called 'consciousness dissolving into space.' Then follows 'space dissolving into lumi-

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nosity,' 'luminosity dissolving into union,' 'union dissolving into wisdom,' 'wisdom dissolving into spontaneous presence' and finally 'spontaneous presence dissolving into primordial purity.' The moment the luminosity dissolves into union, the one hundred peaceful and wrathful families manifest. When one does not recognize the essence of the peaceful deities, then the wrathful deities appear. Not recognizing the essence of the wrathful deities triggers the reoccurrence of habitual tendencies, and the bardo of becoming begins. On the other hand, if we do recognize mind essence, we attain enlightenment in the sambhogakaya level during the bardo of dharmata.

When one realizes one is dead, one should observe the six recollections, such as remembering one's practice and yidam. If an individual knows how to recognize mind essence and does not have any broken samayas it will be possible to take birth from the bud of a lotus flower in one of the five emanated buddha fields, in the five directions. If one has broken samaya, the experience at this time will be like walking in darkness, as if in thick mist. One will be totally lost.

In the bardo of becoming the eighty innate thought states commence again. One starts to think "Where can I take birth?" and begins to search, experiencing immense suffering and worry. If one is going to be born in the three lower realms one's head will not be facing up but will be facing downwards due to the power of karma. If one is going to be born in one of the three higher realms then one will walk upright, one's head held up. One searches for a place to be born, until one comes to the place where one's future mother and father are having intercourse. At the entrance of the womb there will

be many beings waiting, hovering like flies on a piece of meat.

If one is going to be born as a male, one feels aggression toward the father and passion toward the mother; the opposite is true for a female. Through the power of this passion and aggression one immediately enters the womb. The consciousness is like a fly and the red and white elements from the father and mother are like glue; one's mind sticks to that glue.

Once one has entered the womb, one lacks the ability to leave; the freedom to say "I don't like this place." During the consecutive seven-day periods which follow, one's body develops from a tiny embryo and grows bigger and bigger. First the central channel is created, joining the navel to the eyes. Slowly, slowly, every seven days a major change occurs until finally after nine months and ten days, one takes birth from the mother's womb. It is said that our kind mother carries us for nine months and ten days. During this time the breath of mother and child is the same. When the mother is active there is much discomfort to the child. When she eats the child experiences the terror of being pressed under a big mountain. When approaching the end of these nine months and ten days, through the special prana the baby turns upside down.

During birth, one suffers pain that is similar to flesh being peeled from one's bones. The actual moment of birth is like falling from the sky and crashing down on the earth. When one is born and draws the first breath, only then is one independent from the mother's breathing.

At present we are in the bardo of this life, which lasts from the moment of taking birth until the be-

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ginning of the death process. In this bardo we should practice what is called the bardo of meditation, through the instructions of a master. As I explained before, at the moment of death there are the three experiences of whiteness, redness and blackness. If, through the instructions of our master, we can recognize the mind essence without fainting, then recognizing, training and attaining stability is like three snaps of the finger. We attain complete enlightenment.

Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche

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PRELIMINARY TEACHINGS

Out of his great skill, wisdom and compassion, the perfect teacher, Buddha Shakyamuni, gave 84,000 different kinds of teachings according to the various dispositions and capacities of sentient beings. All these teachings can be condensed into the twelve aspects of excellent speech, or simply into Sutra and Tantra. The extensive Sutra includes the three sections of Vinaya, Abhidharma and Sutra. The profound Tantra comprises the four sections of tantras.

The Mirror of Mindfulness belongs to the profound teachings of Tantra, yet it is a combination of both Sutra and Tantra. This text is applicable not only to people who are advanced practitioners but also to beginning Dharma students. It explains the nature of mind and how our minds act in different situations.

The teachings on the bardo are not only for Buddhists. Both Buddhists and non-Buddhists find themselves in various states called 'bardo.' Here bardo literally means a 'period of time between two events.' Right now, we are in the bardo that began at birth and ends with death. After this bardo, others will follow. Therefore, whether Buddhist or not, it is important to study the teachings on the different bardos.

We can study and learn many different philosophies. In Buddhism, the main topic is the inner science of spiritual practice. Basically, Buddhism is concerned with investigating how and what the mind is. What is the fundamental situation of what we call 'mind?' What are its positive aspects, what are its negative sides? Through spiritual or meditative practice, how can we defeat the negative aspects and increase the positive ones?

How do we approach this inner science? We begin by studying the Dharma, the Buddha's teachings. But simply studying the teachings is not enough to cut our doubts and gain complete clarity. We must think them over. That is called 'reflecting upon' or 'contemplating' the teachings. Still, only studying the teachings and thinking about them is not sufficient. At that point our understanding is merely theoretical. In order to experience the truth of the teachings we need to rely on a third point: actual meditation practice. By applying the teachings to our own experience we can gradually conquer the negative aspects of our minds. Once the obscurations of dualistic knowledge and disturbing emotions are purified, the wisdom of knowing the nature as it is and the wisdom of perceiving all that exists will arise. Finally, we will be rid of all defects and will have perfected all the qualities.

It has happened in the past that the master simply rested his mind in the natural state without saying anything. The student, by simply being in his presence, would experience the same realization, without a single spoken word. Sometimes just a few words would pass between them. The student might say, "How is it?" and the master would say, "That's it." That would be enough to transmit the realization.

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Sometimes the transmission of insight would take place through a hand gesture or by showing some symbolic object. But in the present age, this transmission does not seem to happen so often without the student having studied, reflected and meditated. We must depend upon teachings, think about them and put them into practice. Why is that? It is because these days people are more confused and quite different from people who lived in the days of the Buddha. Although our minds may be sharper, they are more fickle. We have less faith and confidence. Because of our sharp but unstable intelligence, it is hard for us to develop real faith. It is very difficult for us to generate devotion, compassion and complete trust in our teacher, while it is easy to find fault with and criticize him. So nowadays it is very rare to find people who have totally realized the absolute state. Good qualities do not arise spontaneously. We must develop the three kinds of knowledge through studying the teachings, reflecting on them and putting them into practice.

Knowledge purifies the stains of lack of understanding, misunderstanding and doubt. Whether we are studying, thinking about or practicing the teachings, it is always important to be free from misunderstandings, doubts and ignorance. By listening and studying attentively we can make sure that we are free of these three defects. First, get a clear picture of what is being said or written. Next, keep it in mind, do not forget it immediately. Afterward, try to go over it another time: What was actually presented? What was the main topic? Was it correct or not? Is it beneficial; is it reasonable? Reflect on it. If there is a point you are not clear about, discuss it with your Dharma friends. In this way, it is possible to gain a

clear comprehension. If we are simply physically present during a Dharma talk but our mind is wandering and we do not really cognize or remember what is being said, it is not a very effective method for reaching understanding.

The Buddha taught in accordance with the nature of how things are. The teachings are true. An intelligent person will study and think about them, and the more he or she does that, the more confidence and trust in the Buddha's teachings will arise as well as great delight in practicing them. Therefore, it is important to be free from the three stains: lack of understanding, misunderstanding and doubt. The way to be free from them is to study, reflect and practice in the correct way.

Furthermore, to engage in the proper learning, reflection and meditation practice of the Buddha's teachings we need to have gathered conducive conditions. The most vital of these is to connect with an authentic teacher. Traditionally a teacher should have experience as well as realization of the three aspects of learning, reflection and meditation. Six additional qualities are used to determine a qualified teacher: being skilled in exposition, debate and composition as well as being virtuous, noble-minded and knowledgeable.

The qualities a teacher should possess vary according to Hinayana, Mahayana or Vajrayana. For example, a Hinayana teacher should have abandoned what should be abandoned and realized what should be realized according to the teachings of that vehicle. Essentially, a competent master of Mahayana needs the quality of having realized the unity of emptiness and compassion. If he does not have that, then there is no benefit in following him. A teacher who has

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such realization cannot possibly give mistaken or misleading teachings because his motivation is pure. If students follow such a teacher, because he has compassion he will not deceive or cheat them or lead them in a wrong direction. Therefore, a teacher must have this most important quality.

Our present situation is indeed very fortunate. We are human beings. We can receive, understand and practice the teachings. We are also able to meet a qualified teacher. We do have some favorable karma. But on the other hand, we do not have the best fortune because there have been many buddhas and enlightened beings in the past, and for some reason or another, we did not connect very well with them and we did not reach perfection. Until now we have not been liberated. It seems as though we have been left behind. In that sense, we have not had the most eminent karma of meeting a fully enlightened buddha.

However, we do have the fortune of meeting some of the present spiritual teachers. It is not that our personal teacher is superior to or stands above the buddhas of the past. It is because the Buddha appeared and taught that there are teachers today who we can meet and from whom we can receive teachings. But, in our own experience, since we have not met the Buddha in person, then our own teacher is extremely compassionate. Thus, in some sense, the personal teacher is even more important for us than a buddha who appeared in the past. Actually, the essence of all the enlightened beings, the buddhas and bodhisattvas of the three times, and the mind of a qualified master are inseparable. In that way, our teacher is the embodiment of the Buddha.

Our lama's mind is the Buddha because the teachings he gives stem from the Buddha's realization and are in accord with his words. The master's voice is the Dharma. He is also the embodiment of the Sangha. Since he manifests as a person who is a great practitioner, his body is the Sangha. In that way, the Three Jewels, the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, are embodied in a qualified master.

While the qualified teacher is a primary condition, the student also should be a proper recipient. What qualities should a practitioner, the student, possess in order to receive the teachings? There are many different categories of qualities that we should have such as devotion, sincere interest, diligence, intelligence and so forth. But the most important quality is our basic motivation for engaging in practice. We should firmly decide and pledge, "I will practice in order to get rid of all disturbing emotions!" We should think, "I will do whatever is necessary to conquer the root of disturbing emotions that cause me to wander in samsara. The precious Dharma is the remedy to vanquish these disturbing emotions." All the teachings that we hear and understand should be put directly into practice. They should not be left as mere theory, mere words; we should apply the teachings directly to our personal experience. Through the strength of this intention we come to really know the Dharma. Without doing that our Dharma practice is not genuine, but will on the contrary further enhance competitiveness and pride. In this case the Dharma will not be of much help.

To illustrate this point: if we pick up a stone that has been lying in a river bed for hundreds of years and split it, we will find that although the surface is wet it is completely dry in the center. That is the ex-

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ample for the person who has studied, reflected upon and meditated on the precious Dharma without assimilating it into his being, and therefore is unable to conquer the disturbing emotions. If we are unable to conquer these emotions, we are like the stone that is wet on the outside but dry within. The excellent thought to bear in mind is the motivation to practice the Dharma as a remedy against our own disturbing emotions. We should begin to cultivate this motivation right this instant, not in a month or a year from today.

Whatever we do, whether we walk around or sit quietly, we should watch ourselves. We should be our own teacher. If we practice Dharma like that, even if we have only studied four lines of teaching, there will still be great benefit. If we fail to truly assimilate the Dharma into our being it becomes empty words, though we may be very skilled at talking about it or writing it down in an eloquent style. Since the Dharma has not really penetrated our hearts and we have not been able to tame our own minds, all our Dharma practice becomes pointless.

Another aspect of motivation is developing the enlightened attitude of bodhichitta, which is the wish that our Dharma endeavors may benefit all sentient beings. The two main types of bodhichitta are called the bodhichitta of aspiration and the bodhichitta of application. 'Bodhichitta of aspiration' means to aspire to attain enlightenment for the sake of all beings. 'Bodhichitta of application' means to actually apply that aspiration and engage in virtuous actions of thought, word and deed, such as the six paramitas, the vast actions of bodhisattvas. When we embrace any act with these two types of bodhichitta, the effect of that act multiplies and will bear extremely benefi-

cial results. To recite even one *mani* becomes a very beneficial act. Without this motivation of bodhichitta even a great virtuous act will not be ultimately beneficial.

Of the six paramitas, the first five — generosity, discipline, patience, diligence and concentration — are called conditioned or conceptual virtues. Conditioned means that by engaging in these, one gathers the accumulation of merit with a reference point. The sixth paramita is 'prajnaparamita,' transcendent knowledge, and cultivating it ensures that one gathers the accumulation of wisdom.

By embracing any of our actions, in this case studying the Dharma, with these six paramitas, we thereby gather the two accumulations. This gathering of merit facilitates our understanding and realization of the two levels of truth through which we will attain the two kayas. We should keep the orientation that the ground, the starting point, is the unity of the two truths, that the path is the unity of the two accumulations, and that the fruition is the unity of the two kayas.

For example, when we make an offering or present a gift after receiving a teaching, that is the first paramita of generosity. We can offer flowers or any material thing or we can offer a mental creation such as a mandala offering of the whole universe, Mt. Meru and the four continents. That is all included in the paramita of generosity.

Secondly, making sure that we have the correct motivation for studying and forming the proper frame of mind is called the paramita of discipline.

The third, the paramita of patience, is not attaching much importance to our physical state. Sometimes we may be a little too cold or too hot, or

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our seat may be uncomfortable, or the talk may last a little too long. Nevertheless, do not give in to weariness but understand that the teachings are more important than such temporary discomforts.

Fourth, the paramita of diligence is that we take delight in and exert ourselves in absorbing what is being taught. We examine the meaning of the words, wondering "Do I understand this? Will I remember it?" To have an acute desire to understand and a sense of delight with the teaching constitutes the fourth paramita.

Fifth, the paramita of concentration ensures that we are not carried away by other sense impressions such as distracting sounds, physical sensations or wandering thoughts. We need only to listen with our ears and try to understand the meaning of what is being said. Nondistraction is the heart of the fifth paramita of concentration.

The sixth, prajnaparamita or transcendent knowledge, means that at best, we should listen while understanding the unity of the two truths. In other words, we should understand relative truth as dependent arising and ultimate truth as emptiness. If we cannot do that, at least we should have the intention, "I will try to study, reflect and meditate within the state of realizing the view of emptiness." Embracing our act of studying with the six paramitas will be extremely beneficial, and that benefit will extend into all aspects of our Dharma practice. If we can embrace both the relative and ultimate aspects of practice with the six paramitas, we will be able to quickly progress through the five paths and the ten bhumis, like flying in the fastest airplane.

The key point of any practice is to unite skillful means and knowledge, prajna and upaya. The combi-

nation of means and knowledge is the swiftest way to liberation and is therefore extremely important.

In short, the perfect condition for spiritual practice and true understanding is the meeting between an excellent teacher and a qualified student. To approach this from another perspective, according to Mahamudra, Dzogchen and Madhyamika, the basic view of emptiness is totally free from any mental constructs and is realized through two methods: devotion and compassion. For that reason it is extremely important to engender devotion to the root teacher from the core of our heart in order to receive blessings. The second method is through compassion for those who have not realized the nature of their minds and therefore wander through the different samsaric existences. When considering these beings who are not aware of their mind essence and roam in samsara only to experience suffering, we cannot help but feel compassion.

There are basically two possibilities: either one is realized or one is confused. If one is realized, then one is a buddha; if one is confused, then one is a sentient being. What are the benefits and reasons for realizing the unmistakable view? Being realized means that one has understood the nonexistence of an ego, so that clinging or fixation on a self-entity falls away. Therefore, everything connected with that, the disturbing emotions and karmic actions that compel one to continue in samsara, cease. Realization means that one is liberated from samsara and at the same time, one is endowed with many sublime enlightened qualities. An enlightened or realized person becomes an example of that toward which others can then strive, have respect for and learn from. That is why

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the Three Jewels are considered something to take refuge in, objects worthy of trust.

On the other hand, beings who are confused, unrealized and holding on to the idea of a self will consequently give rise to disturbing emotions and karmic actions, thus creating suffering to be experienced in the different realms of samsaric existence. Reflecting on this, we cannot help feeling compassion. All the phenomena of samsara and nirvana are ultimately, primordially and utterly pure. In the natural state or in the essence, there are no such things as birth, life, death, joy, sorrow and so forth. Needless to mention, ultimately even these words are totally nonexistent. All sentient beings are deluded. They do not realize the natural state of emptiness, free from fabrication, beyond arising, dwelling and ceasing. Their minds are caught in fixation, endlessly imprisoned by this hollow dualistic experience. Thinking of this, we cannot help feeling compassion for the suffering beings who wander in samsara.

Due to the karmic deeds we have created we are reborn into different realms. In all of them some misery is experienced. You have probably heard about these realms. It is said that there are six realms of samsaric existence: in the hells one suffers from heat and cold, as a hungry ghost from hunger and thirst, as an animal from slavery and stupidity. In the human realm, there is the suffering of birth, old age, sickness and death. In the realms of the gods one suffers from death and transmigration and among demigods from fighting and strife.

In general, there are the three major sufferings: the suffering of change, the suffering upon suffering and the all-pervading suffering of formation. Then there are the lesser pains of not getting what one

wants, meeting with what one does not want, being separated from loved ones and encountering enemies.

No matter where one is born in the six realms there is automatically suffering. Thinking of how sentient beings experience so much misery, we feel compassion for them from the core of our heart. The object of our compassion is sentient beings who have at some point in our past lives been our own mother or father and shown us immense kindness. How can we liberate our 'old mother' sentient beings? How can we lead them to the state of enlightenment, the level of buddhahood?

Out of the wish to liberate all these sentient beings the buddhas have taught countless different skillful means, such as the aforementioned Hinayana, Mahayana and Vajrayana vehicles. In particular, it is said that the Vajrayana teachings have many methods, few hardships and are meant for people of the sharpest faculties. Among the Vajrayana teachings, the forefathers of the Practice Lineage have given many instructions that summarize all the essential key points. Just as butter can be extracted as the essence of milk, the teachings on the four bardos can be extracted from the profound tantras, the extensive sutras and all the 84,000 different teachings of the Buddha.

In general, when people hear the word bardo they think it means only the period between death and the next rebirth. When a person has passed away people say, "Now he is in the bardo." It is considered a terrifying, painful, difficult period. Therefore, we should generate compassion toward, offer prayers for and perform virtuous actions to help the person who is in that state.

Preliminary Teachings

But the after-death state is not the only meaning of bardo. Bardo means the period between two events. According to *Liberation Through Hearing in the Bardo* there are six bardos. All aspects of life and death can be categorized as different bardo periods. In *The Mirror of Mindfulness* by Tsele Natsok Rangdröl, there are four: The natural bardo of this life, the painful bardo of dying, the luminous bardo of dharmata, and the karmic bardo of becoming.

Tsele Natsok Rangdröl mentions that the two additional bardos, the bardo of the meditation state and the bardo of dream, are included within the bardo of this life.

These four periods form a complete cycle. Each will be explained in succeeding chapters under three points. First, each bardo is identified briefly and precisely. Second, an explanation is given of what one experiences during that state. Third, clarification is given regarding the instructions on how to deal with those experiences. Furthermore, Tsele Natsok Rangdröl explains how the bardos appear to an ordinary person who has never practiced, how they appear to a practitioner who has some degree of experience, and how these bardos appear to a person who has perfected the practice.

In *The Mirror of Mindfulness*, Tsele Rinpoche clarifies the general points of these bardo experiences. His style is 'general' because it is not one specific type of bardo system, but a gathering of all the various teachings transmitted orally from teacher to student as well as those that were hidden as concealed treasures or *terma*. The text clarifies these instructions by arranging them so they can be used as a basis for a learned person to give a detailed explanation. In addition, a beginner can read the text and

find it comprehensible. For the practitioner, *The Mirror of Mindfulness* is written as a practical guidebook, an instruction manual.

The English translation of *The Mirror of Mindfulness*, I believe, is quite honest and straightforward so the main body of the text is not hard to comprehend. In the following chapters I will therefore focus on the vital points within the eminent instructions of Tsele Natsok Rangdröl and the topics that are the most difficult to understand.

Please keep in mind that this teaching is not merely a description of the bardo states. It is a guidebook on how to apply the instructions of the buddhas in this life and the next. Depending on the individual, different experiences will occur. Therefore, one must know the different practices to apply, what benefits will arise from doing so and what consequences will come from failing to practice. Precious teachings abound for those on the path. The beginner should be instructed in the methods to be applied when arriving at the bardo of dying and dharmata, and prepare for that right now.

Ordinary people spend their lives pursuing happiness and pleasure. They try to gain fame, power, influence and material wealth in any way possible. They are preoccupied with creating a situation that they imagine will bring contentment. That is the aim of the ordinary person. But a practitioner aims for liberation during any of the four bardos. Therefore, he will already prepare during this lifetime to be liberated right now. If he fails in that, then at least he will be liberated at the time of death or in one of the other bardos. To do that a practitioner must acquaint himself with the practices that are applicable to each bardo.

THE NATURAL BARDO OF THIS LIFE

Depending upon the context and the recipient there are many ways to expound the Dharma. The main reason to explain the Dharma is to help the practitioner actually practice. There is a certain way of teaching for simple practitioners and meditators. One style is called the 'old lady's pointing-out instruction,' which uses simple words as well as hand and facial expressions to point directly to the heart of the matter.

Traditionally, certain methods of teaching existed in India. For example the Buddha himself taught within the context of the five perfections as well as by means of his miraculous powers of body, speech and mind. A bodhisattva's way of teaching is through the six paramitas and a shravaka's or arhant's way of teaching is called the three aspects of purity. In the great monastery of Nalanda, the pandita's way of teaching treatises was through what is called the five major indices of exposition. In other monasteries such as Vikramashila, panditas would traditionally teach in accordance with the three aspects of purity. But here in this book, I am mainly concerned with teaching directly, in order to immediately benefit the reader's mind. This benefit does not depend so much

on eloquent expressions and poetic analogies, but on communicating in a straightforward way what is important.

The first of the four bardos explained in *The Mirror of Mindfulness* is called the bardo of this life, which in Tibetan literally means the bardo of taking birth and remaining alive.

Regarding taking rebirth, there are traditionally four types of birth: one may be born from a womb, from an egg, from heat and moisture, or instantaneously born. With a few exceptions, people in this world are born from the womb of their mother. The bardo of this life lasts from the moment we are born until we meet with one of the 404 types of illness or 80,000 negative influences that are the causes of death. The period from birth until one meets the circumstances for death defines the bardo of this life.

How people experience and spend their time in the bardo of this life depends upon their different ways of experiencing what they consider to be reality. We all have various ideas of what things are, how we experience them, and who we are as the perceiver.

In Buddhism there are several levels of schools of thought. The four Buddhist philosophical schools have specific ways of defining the two truths, subject, object and reality. According to their individual systems, different things are accepted as real and true. Each school examines viewpoints inferior to its own, finds and rejects faults and then establishes certain statements which that school claims to be true. Since all the phenomena of samsara, nirvana and the path is included within the categories of the two truths, relative truth and ultimate truth, the distinctions between the schools are merely how they define the two truths. A person who has not adopted a philo-

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sophical view does not think too much about the difference between the two levels of truth. As soon as we start to study philosophy, we gain some idea of what is not just apparent reality, how things seem, but of the real situation, of what is really true. Depending upon the degree to which we understand ultimate truth, there are different kinds of experience and different levels of realization.

Let us examine the experience of the bardo of this life for the person of the highest caliber, with the greatest degree of intelligence. A person who has spent much time studying, contemplating and practicing the unity of the two truths can rapidly progress on the path of gathering the two accumulations. Therefore, realization will be attained more swiftly and this person will quickly realize things as they are. For the most fortunate, meaning the person of the greatest capacity, the world and its inhabitants are seen as a spontaneously perfect mandala. What does that mean? According to the general Mahayana teachings all sentient beings have buddha nature, sugatagarbha, and everything is pervaded by the nature of the three kayas. According to the Vajrayana system, all that appears and exists is of a divine nature, all sounds are mantra and all thought occurrences are the display or expression of innate wakefulness. The person of the highest intelligence realizes that this is how it is. It is not that he must create the mandala of deities, mantra and wisdom through some mental construct or visualization practice. On the contrary, he realizes the all-encompassing purity. The realization of the superior type of person is simply a matter of understanding things as they truly are.

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Take the example of Milarepa. He said, "When ordinary people look at me they feel pity, but when the enlightened masters regard me, they are overjoyed." Such a person who has reached a high level of realization through practice may look like an ordinary human being but his mind is not different from the mind of the buddhas. Tsele Rinpoche describes realized beings by saying, "their thoughts manifest as the play of dharmata, everything is the nature of the three kayas" (*Mirror of Mindfulness*, page 19). Milarepa had realized that. According to Dzogchen, this state of realization is called the all-encompassing purity of appearance and existence. Another term used is the 'wisdom continuity of individual experience.'

From birth until death an ordinary person is continuously under the power of ignorance, negative tendencies, deluded experiences and solid fixations. What does that mean? Before birth one already had inherent ego-clinging. Holding tightly to the idea 'I am,' ego-clinging creates a solid fixation on reality, on oneself as the perceiver and other things as the perceived. This becomes a chain reaction which draws one through life after life, birth after birth in the six realms of samsara: through the hell realms, through the realms of hungry ghosts, animals, humans, gods and demi-gods. This vicious circle goes on endlessly. That is how the bardo of this life is experienced by an ordinary person. In this way, through the force of karma, one continues until attaining liberation through practice.

Tsele states that "Ordinary, ignorant people . . . regard the unreal to be real and expect the impermanent to be permanent" (*Mirror of Mindfulness*, page 20). There is a lot one can say about this state-

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ment. Most people do not pay attention to anything other than what is superficially real, such as what we perceive with our eyes, ears, nose and tongue. Since we are caught up in the web of what is apparently so and do not think much about what is true and real, we rarely perceive the ultimate truth. Our scope is limited to superficial reality. But by examining things using reason and quotations from the scriptures, and by analyzing the perceived objects and the perceiving mind, we can arrive at the understanding that all things are without true existence. The main difference between buddhas and sentient beings is that a buddha has realized that all phenomena are totally devoid of arising, dwelling and ceasing and have no true existence, whereas sentient beings believe everything to be real and solid. Another difference between buddhas and sentient beings is that buddhas understand that things are nonexistent whereas sentient beings believe things exist.

Through understanding the two truths, we understand the nature of both the outer perceived objects and the inner perceiving mind. We understand that everything in the world is without substance and lacks true self-existence. Things do not exist concretely and independently. There is no external creator who created them.

In short, examining things more closely, we can discover that outer phenomena lack true existence. Even the old culprit of ego-clinging, holding on to the thought 'I am,' can be found to have no real basis. We can gain some understanding of the nature of things, but such understanding is nevertheless still theoretical. It is not sufficient to just have the idea that all things, including oneself, are empty. We must experience it directly. To gain real experience, we

must go to a teacher who has this experience himself and knows how to simply rest in the natural state without forming mistaken mental constructs; someone who perceives things as they are — empty and without solid reality.

Moreover, we need to combine our own reasoning with the statements of the enlightened ones and with the oral instructions of a qualified teacher. A qualified teacher is one who has compassion, understanding and experience. When receiving the oral instructions, we should be open-minded, have faith and devotion, and also be intelligent and industrious in applying these teachings afterward. Through personal experience we will discover what is called egolessness according to the general teachings, innate wakefulness according to Mahamudra, or in Dzogchen terms, the single sphere of dharmakaya.

Let's examine more closely this statement that we as ordinary people expect the impermanent to be permanent. Everybody has some coarse understanding of impermanence, but seldom is it on a subtle level. We regard a thing as permanent until it is destroyed. For example, a person is permanent until he or she dies; a cup is permanent until it falls and breaks. That is a coarse understanding of impermanence. Through understanding subtle impermanence we realize that everything changes from instant to instant, moment to moment. Every micro-second a person is changing.

We can give aging a pleasant gloss by saying that a child is growing up and getting bigger, but actually, from the moment he was born, the child ages every day and grows closer to death. The same pertains to the seasons and all other things. We say, "Now it is summer", and we have the idea that al-

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though summer is impermanent it seems uninterrupted. Summertime is suddenly gone and we call it autumn. Actually things change with every instant; even the most subtle particles in concrete matter change continuously. Nothing remains stable from one moment to the next. That is subtle impermanence.

Impermanence is a fact we should become accustomed to and not forget. Let us make the understanding of impermanence grow in our minds. By so doing we will have less attachment to the things of this life, and our ability to understand the teachings, to put them into practice, and to rest in the equanimity of meditation will increase. Training the mind in understanding impermanence will make it easier to practice meditation. It is said, "If you cling to this life, you are not a practitioner."¹ By being attached to the things of this life and feeling that what we have is not enough, we waste our time and slowly our life runs out.

There are four main aspects to impermanence. The first is that everybody who is born will die. It is one hundred percent certain that one who has taken birth will die. There is no question about this; it is just a matter of time.

Second, people who come together will separate. Consider the yearly seminar at my monastery in Nepal. It is a group of eighty or ninety people. After a few weeks they separate. After a few months everyone leaves the place and several years in the future they all will be living in different places in the world.

1. This quotation is the first of four lines of teaching given to Sakya Pandita in a vision of Manjushri. The others are: "If you cling to samsaric existence, you have no renunciation. If you cling to self-interest, you have no bodhichitta. If you have any clinging, you don't have the view."

Some of them will have already died and most of them may never meet again. After one hundred years, everyone will be dead, some cremated and some buried under the ground. After one thousand years their names and all trace of their existence will have completely disappeared. That is a fact of impermanence.

Third, everything that has been gathered will be dispersed or depleted. No matter how much wealth and material possessions we may amass, it will all be used up sooner or later.

Finally, everything that is constructed will be destroyed. No matter how solid the material, be it steel, iron or whatever, sooner or later the object will fall apart and disintegrate.

Those are the four facts of impermanence. Just as it is the nature of fire to be hot and of water to be wet, all phenomena are by nature impermanent.

In addition to mistaking the impermanent as permanent, we also confuse the painful and pleasant. We persistently create the causes of suffering and completely waste our lives with the futile, deluded and attached activities of the eight worldly concerns, such as subduing enemies and protecting friends. Ego-clinging, this delusion that we are born with, the concept of a truly existent 'I,' creates the disturbing emotions of pride, jealousy, aggression and attachment. We instinctively feel that our opinion is quite important, while the opinions of other people have less value. Due to this habitual tendency we do not attach much importance to what other people feel or say. We try to override them and gain the upper hand through our words, attitudes and physical actions. This is called the 'activity of subduing enemies.'

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There are many ways we can subdue enemies or people we dislike. We can physically kill them. We can undermine them by slander or criticism, trying to turn others against them. We can show an angry face or glare in an unkind way. We can feel irritated when other people have a good time or things go well for them. All this comes from attachment and aggression in our own mind. These disturbing emotions arising from ego-clinging are the root cause of disagreement between people, and on a larger scale between countries.

Someone skilled in politics never subdues the opposition directly, but rather works behind the scenes, having other people say to them what he would not say directly. When meeting face to face with his opponents he will shake their hands, smile and speak of friendship and co-operation while plotting strategies to undermine them. There are many ways to subdue enemies, either directly, indirectly or in a concealed manner.

In any case, our main obstacle is ego-clinging, the tendency to think that what 'I' feel and need is extremely important. Because this ego-clinging holds such a persistent, tight grip on our minds, we are never really satisfied. Whatever situation we find ourselves in, it is never perfect. There is always something missing, something extra that we need. If we get what we want, we find that we need twice as much. If we have one dollar, we need two; if we get two, we need one hundred or one thousand. Sometimes even that is not enough. We need ten thousand or one hundred thousand dollars.

The same applies to other possessions. At first it is difficult to obtain our heart's desire but once we acquire this treasured object, it is difficult to keep it.

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Maybe it breaks, maybe it is stolen, maybe it wears out. Next it is difficult to increase what we have. And finally, the more possessions we have, the greater our anxiety. A poor person doesn't worry about losing things he does not possess. In the old days one worried about cattle and servants because they had to be fed and cared for. These days we worry more about our technical gadgets and household utilities. It is annoying when our things break down and have to be repaired.

As ordinary people, our minds are preoccupied by the eight worldly concerns: attachment to pleasure, praise, good reputation, material gain, and aversion to their opposites. As well, we have the pain and worry of losing what we have and not getting what we want. In short, most people who are not practitioners spend their lives concerned with mundane aims, thinking of themselves, helping their friends and subduing their enemies. They waste the bardo of this life immersed in the eight worldly concerns. That is quite sad.

At night during our sleep we are unconscious, like someone drunk or drugged. Unless this state is embraced by the key points of meditative practice, we are not much different from a breathing corpse. Someone very drunk or drugged may become extremely unpleasant and obnoxious although when sober he may act dignified. In the same way, someone sleeping deeply appears very dull and stupid and we don't recognize the intelligent person he usually is.

During the dream state, most of the time is spent reacting to our experiences with either attachment, aversion or indifference. Sometimes dreams are very unpleasant, we may have nightmares and try to run

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away. In this way, the bardo state of dream and that of meditation are also included within the bardo of this life.

Tsele quotes the *Sutra of the Noble Source of the Precious Ones*, in which the Buddha said, "By the power of attachment to wrong thinking, all beings are completely tossed about in this [samsara]" (p. 20). Wrong thinking refers to our way of perceiving things—to perceive without the understanding that everything is unreal and lacks concrete substance. One way to understand this is through a type of logic called the reasoning of interdependence. Understanding this reasoning, we understand that things are unreal, that they only have dependent existence. Without that understanding our thinking is incorrect and in contradiction with the way things are. Attachment to that kind of wrong thinking, and attachment and aversion in general, are what cause beings to be completely tossed about in the six realms of samsara.

Conversely, the sutra continues, the person who understands the equal nature of things sees the self-existing *tathagata*, the true buddha. He will attain the supreme qualities of peace which means he will attain realization of the way things are. Understanding and not understanding the nature of things is the difference between buddhas and beings.

Now I have discussed the bardo of this life both for people who are realized and those who are not realized. However, hearing such a description is not sufficient. We need to know what to do ourselves. If we think of our lives, what have we done up to now? Think ahead; what we will do in the future? What would be the most valuable and important way to spend the rest of our lives? At this point Tsele Rin-

poche says that one can use different frames of reference: either the teachings of an enlightened buddha or one's own intelligence. We should not blindly believe what others say, not even the Buddha, but personally examine the teachings. Only then can we discover the truth of how things seem and how they really are. Gaining confidence in that truth, we should receive oral instructions from a teacher and learn how to put his teachings into practice.

In Tibetan Buddhism there are four different schools or lineages, each with particular qualities and different emphases. There is a saying that the Gelug School inherited the Sutra teachings, the Sakya School inherited composition, the Kagyü School inherited practice and the Nyingma School inherited Mantra, meaning the Vajrayana teachings. The Gelug and to some extent the Sakya schools emphasize study and reflection on the teachings. They consider it very important to gain a complete comprehension of the Buddhist teachings, mainly of what is called the Five Great Treatises, five major scholastic works. They spend a great deal of time studying these. After gaining a clear understanding of these teachings they go on to actual meditation practice. In the Kagyü and Nyingma traditions the emphasis is a little different; they stress immediate application of whatever teachings one has received. Of course we should study and reflect on the teachings, but not for too long because life is short. We must gain some degree of intellectual understanding, but it also must be put into practice. Personal application is the focal point. Unless we wish to become a teacher, someone who benefits beings in a vast way, we need not acquire detailed intellectual understanding of the teachings.

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The Mirror of Mindfulness mentions that, according to the Nyingma system, we should be like a swallow entering its nest. To enter its nest a swallow first makes sure that the position of the nest is safe and secure. Being free of all doubts, it enters directly and without hesitation. This refers to the approach in the Kagyü and Nyingma Schools. We must gain sufficient conviction in the main point, the empty nature of things. To do that, one must first find and study with a qualified teacher.

Traditionally it is said that, at first, one should be skilled in examining the teacher, next one should be skilled in following the teacher, and finally one should be skilled in absorbing his understanding, assimilating his wisdom. To do that one must first seek out a genuine teacher. Finding a charlatan, following him blindly, taking perverted teachings and then becoming a charlatan oneself would be disastrous. It is important to find a qualified master and receive the teachings in a proper way, following them correctly oneself. We should follow the teacher sincerely, please him in many ways and be free from deceit in thought, word and deed.

We also should receive the three sets of precepts: the Hinayana vows of Individual Liberation, the Mahayana training according to the bodhisattva path, and the Vajrayana samayas. Regarding the vows of Individual Liberation, the highest degree means full ordination as a monk or nun, next best as a novice, or at least, as a male or female lay person, someone who has taken refuge. Moreover, corresponding to the level of vows we have taken, we should keep the precepts of Hinayana, Mahayana and Vajrayana. As Tsele mentions about these vows, "One should observe them without being tainted by even the tiniest

stain of violation, breach, fault or downfall" (p. 21). If the vows and samayas are broken, mend them immediately.

"Studying and reflecting upon all the stages of the Sutra and Tantra vehicles without prejudice, one should cast away any partiality and clinging to a certain school of thought." (p. 21). This means that while engaging in Dharma practice, do not hold onto any idea such as "I am a Gelugpa," "I am a Kagyüpa," "I do not like other teachings." It is very important to be free from such prejudice. Learning and studying should be unbiased because we need to understand what is what, both in the Buddhist and the non-Buddhist teachings. Understand the different views taught, and then you will know what is correct or incorrect. Without having studied, how can one recognize correct teaching from wrong view, true from untrue? The same applies to the non-Buddhist philosophies and schools: we need a thorough knowledge of them to understand whether they are right. It is not valid to say that everything non-Buddhist is wrong. It is quite foolish to hold such an attitude, even though according to Buddhism all 360 non-Buddhist schools of philosophy are said to hold incorrect views. Why is that? It is not because they are non-Buddhist but because their tenets cannot ultimately withstand the scrutiny of reasoning and logic. Wrong views are incorrect in the sense of not being in accord with the nature of things. Only for that reason are the non-Buddhist schools of thought called wrong views. This is important to know. Avoid sectarianism.

A good example of someone possessing learning free from prejudice is the present Dalai Lama, who studied and received teachings from masters of all

the different lineages, not just from his school. In Tibet, the non-sectarian Rimey tradition was promoted by Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo the First and such lineage-holders as Khyentse Chökyi Lodrö. The present Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche has studied all the teachings of the different traditions and is respected by all schools as an incomparable master in expounding teachings and practices. His is a good example to follow.

“If one goes astray, becoming attached to great learning, one will merely pursue words of sophistry without understanding the actual meaning. One should, therefore take to heart and apply to oneself whatever one has learned” (p. 21). Our studies of the Dharma have become perverted once we deem it sufficient to be able to explain to others the stages of the path and all the details of the teachings. What is the whole point of study? The vital point is to gain some understanding that can give rise to direct experience. To treat the Dharma merely as intellectual theory is to waste the teachings.

One of my teachers, Kunu Lama Tendzin Gyatso, was an Indian. He was born in Himachal Pradesh and learned Sanskrit and Pali. In Sikkim he started to study the Buddhist sciences and later went to Tibet where he studied at Sera and Drepung monasteries. Finally he went to Kham. He was quite learned but also very proud and thought that no one in Kham could match him. Arriving at Katok Monastery, he met Katok Situ Rinpoche but was not particularly impressed. He thought “How can such an ignorant lama have so many monks and be the abbot of this huge monastery? What is going on?”

Kunu Rinpoche loved books and wanted to stay in the library to do what is called a ‘library retreat.’

That means a scholar locks himself up for a certain time and reads all the books, finding out who wrote what and so forth. When he asked permission to do that, Katok Situ Rinpoche responded, "Our library is not very impressive, but we do have a few good books. To examine them all will take you a few years. Still, you might be able to cover most in five or six months."

Inside the library Kunu Rinpoche found many original Indian manuscripts in Sanskrit and Pali, written on palm leaves. He also found many books of which he had never heard. The Sanskrit spelling, he later said, was terrible but the meaning was intact. Discussing this with Katok Situ Rinpoche, he discovered that the Rinpoche actually knew Sanskrit very well and was familiar with all the teachings and meanings contained in the books. At this point Kunu Rinpoche's faith and devotion started to take root.

Because of Kunu Rinpoche's nonsectarian attitude and his all-encompassing knowledge, if you ask anybody nowadays what school Kunu Rinpoche belonged to, the Nyingma followers will say he is Nyingmapa because he received many teachings from Nyingma masters; the Gelug followers will say he was Gelugpa because he followed the Gelug teachings, receiving them and passing them on to others. You can ask almost anyone from any school and receive a different answer because Kunu Rinpoche studied everywhere. But if you asked Kunu Rinpoche himself, he would say "I am just a Buddhist. I practice the unity of Sutra and Tantra." It is best if we can emulate him: study with all the schools and be completely without prejudice. If we cannot do this, at least we should refrain from disparaging other traditions.

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We may not have the time or intelligence to absorb the entire body of Dharma teachings, so we should just follow the teaching we ourselves have received, put it into practice, and at the same time refrain from criticizing other traditions. The oral instructions of one's master alone embody the essence of all learning and reflection. We should take these oral instructions to heart without any doubt. Even if we have received only four lines of teaching, it should be assimilated in our heart and put into practice. Otherwise there is no point in having received any teachings.

The Buddha gave many teachings and the commentaries on them abound. Unless one has the highest degree of diligence and intelligence, one cannot examine them all and gain understanding. Therefore, it is most important to put into practice the oral teachings of the master with whom we study. Our teacher can condense the body of teachings into a form we can apply. Do not stop at just having received teachings; take them to heart.

The process of understanding and becoming free from doubt is like refining gold: the useless parts are filtered out and we are left with pure gold. Having received the teachings and put them into practice, we gain some understanding but also some doubts. To increase this understanding, clarify doubts with your teacher repeatedly. By repeatedly practicing and receiving teachings, our understanding becomes more and more refined until finally, we are free from doubt. To make water drinkable in places like Nepal, we boil it for a long time to get rid of all the microbes until finally we have pure drinking water. Our understanding of the teachings should be equally refined.

When we do not abandon worldly pursuits, we squander this life. Sometimes people say, "I have no time to practice." What is the main reason for saying that? It is because they are too preoccupied with preparations for a comfortable life. Sometimes people do not even find time to eat their meals or sleep properly because they are so busy working, making arrangements, or striving for some aim. My teachers often said, "Human life is spent preparing. While preparing for the future one's life flies by. One dies with preparations still unfinished." People pursue material things; they buy what they want to possess and enjoy. But, often it happens that they pass away before finding time to wear all their clothes, spend their savings or enjoy their gadgets.

Tsele Rinpoche addresses people who consider practice the most important part of their life. Basically there are three types of practitioners: those who stay alone in secluded places, those who take ordination and live monastically, and those who try to practice within the context of ordinary life. In the past in Tibet and India, it was impossible to count the people who made practice the most important part of their lives and eventually reached accomplishment. Many, many people, like the flow of a huge river, attained enlightenment by abandoning all worldly concerns and focusing exclusively on practice. The best known was Jetsun Milarepa, who was completely unattached to the fleeting objects of mundane pleasure. For example, if invited to a five-star hotel, he would not be fascinated but think, "How futile! How pointless to believe that these luxuries bring any lasting pleasure. They are all completely impermanent." He might even be saddened by seeing the futility of such aims.

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Most people are preoccupied with subduing their enemies and protecting their friends. They regard the false as true and the impermanent as permanent. They are bound by the five poisons. Through the eighty-four thousand types of disturbing emotions, they accumulate karma due to attachment, anger and delusion. Even if they go to a secluded place, they may stay for a couple of months or a few years and then give up. Their reason for going into retreat may have been that they were tired of life's hassles. Maybe someone close to them had died, or maybe they did not get along with their spouse, boyfriend or girlfriend. Something had happened to make them feel tired of mundane things and want to practice. Nonetheless, not having completely cut all ties and attachments, after some time they return to civilization and live among other people. They return to their past habits. This is not good. It is better to completely cut attachments.

Why should one go to a secluded place? From solitude comes silence, and from silence comes mental quiet. Only when undisturbed by mundane concerns do we have the free time to concentrate one hundred percent on practice. The practitioner should stay in a clean, quiet, secluded place. Many great practitioners said that the mind becomes clear and realization is easily attained in a clean place with pure water and air. In such an environment experience and realization have a chance to increase quickly, whereas progress is much slower when one is involved in many business dealings and activities.

Often it is said that the foremost practitioner is someone who abandons the world and lives in secluded mountains. The Buddha abandoned his kingdom as though it were a heap of straw or a nest of

snakes. Yet unlike the birds and animals in secluded places, he exerted body, speech and mind in spiritual practice. Although it is said that the foremost practitioner gives up all worldly concerns and stays in mountain dwellings, just to physically stay in a secluded place is not enough. Our frame of mind is most important. On the other hand, if we can practice in an ordinary life situation without being carried away by the disturbing emotions that arise, we will progress even faster than in a retreat situation. Still, there is great benefit in abandoning all worldly concerns and giving up attachment to material goods.

It is difficult for us to abandon everything immediately, and even the attempt to practice in a mundane situation brings incredibly great benefits. Actually, the person with the highest intelligence and diligence can practice in any situation. Many animals and birds live in mountain caves; there is in itself nothing special about physical seclusion.

The main point of all the teachings is to understand the unity of emptiness and compassion, often called 'emptiness with a core of compassion.' Once you realize this vital point, enlightenment can be reached even without vast learning. But without realizing the unity of emptiness and compassion, to have studied a lot, to be able to expound all the teachings, or to write many books is not enough to attain enlightenment. Ultimately such activities are not sufficient and one will continue to wander in samsara. Buddhahood means that faults are exhausted and enlightened qualities perfected. The word buddha is not applied to people who have gathered a lot of information. Buddhahood is attained through meditative experience and not only through study and reflection.

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One might think, "Where do wisdom, faith and devotion belong if it is only necessary to realize the unity of emptiness and compassion?" Actually, all those qualities are embodied within that unity. How are these qualities contained in emptiness with a core of compassion? In the state of having realized emptiness and compassion as inseparable, compassionate wakefulness is already present. Through recognizing that, devotion and faith become unshakable. There is no longer any room for doubt.

At present while we are not fully realized, our devotion to a teacher is shaky and fluctuates like the moon waxing and waning. When the teacher is kind and speaks pleasingly we feel tremendous devotion. But the moment he criticizes us or says something that we think is not good, then our faith immediately vanishes. We feel irritated and are ready to criticize and disparage him. We may even get angry and argue with him. That is the nature of our fickle faith. Why is this? It is because of lacking real insight into emptiness. The greater our understanding of emptiness, the more devotion and confidence we will naturally have in realized beings and in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. Right now our view of emptiness is merely a mental construct, nothing more than an idea; our compassion and devotion are also fabricated and artificial. Yet, the moment realization of emptiness with a core of compassion dawns within us, all these qualities become genuine. Just as water is naturally wet and fire is hot, true insight into emptiness is naturally compassionate.

Although we may understand the nature of emptiness, we should not belittle the consequences of virtue and evil, but have firm trust in the unfailing interdependence of cause and effect. We must train

ourselves in a combined view and behavior that accords with the words of the Victorious One. Understanding the correct view of emptiness is not sufficient; it is only the starting point. We must journey along the path and progress through the bhumis. If the view of emptiness is emphasized too much at the outset of our practice, we may intellectually convince ourselves: "Everything is empty. There is no cause and effect! Reality is totally beyond these superficial appearances!" Based on such convictions devoid of direct experience we may overlook the importance of how we treat others. Our practice becomes distorted. Intellectual conviction may be accompanied by meditation experiences such as bliss, clarity and non-thought. One may suddenly feel quite enlightened, that one has already gone through the whole path and that there is nothing more to do and develop. This kind of false conviction becomes a strong hindrance to further progress. It is essential to respect the law of cause and effect.

We must know the difference between negative and positive actions, because everything does exist on a superficial or relative level. We do experience pleasure and pain; we have past and future lives and our negative and positive actions bear fruit. Whatever we have to go through is true on the superficial level. At the same time, on the ultimate level all phenomena, both subject and object, are only the nature of thatness, totally free from the constructs of arising, dwelling and ceasing. This is truth on the ultimate level, but the superficial is also true. Therefore, since all things do arise interdependently, as long as we are not completely enlightened we must carefully consider negative and positive deeds, and gather the conceptual accumulation of merit and the noncon-

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ceptual accumulation of wisdom. We do this by avoiding negative actions, especially the ten non-virtues, and adopting positive actions, the ten virtues. Why? Just as a child is not an adult and a sprout is not a flower, intellectual understanding of the view doesn't equal enlightenment. This understanding is the seed that will grow into the fully blossomed flower, but it is not yet matured. The plant grows due to a combination of different conditions: there must be a seed, fertile ground, moisture, light, warmth, space and fertilizer. Time must pass. When these conditions come together a plant has no choice but to grow. If one condition is lacking, the plant itself lacks the power to grow.

Until a crop has fully ripened, it is essential to guard it carefully. There might be hail or severe winds; there might be too much water or too little. A skilled farmer will protect against these negative conditions. It can be quite difficult. The most crucial aspect for growth is the place of planting. The ground should be stable, not eroded or shaky. For practitioners like ourselves, this means beginning with a quality of steadiness and constancy. We also need the moisture of compassion and the warmth of devotion. When these conditions are met, there is no way to avoid the blossoming of the flower of emptiness. This is a vital point.

Different religions have their own definitions of good and evil. According to Buddhism, one creates positive and negative karma through thought, word and deed. How to avoid the negative and adopt the positive is defined according to the following levels of teachings: the moral codes of the Hinayana precepts of Individual Liberation, the Mahayana trainings of

the bodhisattvas and the Vajrayana samayas of the knowledge holders.

I will now explain the basis of all vows, which is to abandon the ten unvirtuous actions. First, the negative actions of body are killing, taking what is not given and sexual misconduct. The opposite of killing is to save the lives of other beings; the opposite of stealing is being generous and the opposite of sexual misconduct is leading a decent and proper life. There is great merit in avoiding what is negative and adhering to what is right.

There are four negative actions committed through speech. During a single day, we can commit the negative actions of lying, divisive talk, harsh words and idle gossip. We might not notice, but it is not difficult to twist words a little bit to become a lie. When passing on information it is very easy to add something totally pointless that disturbs others. It is common to say derisive words that separate people. Be careful about these actions. Any attempt to avoid them brings great merit.

Most destructive are the negative actions of mind: ill-will, covetousness and wrong view. All religions agree that ill-will and covetousness are misdeeds. Covetousness is to desire the possessions of others. When perceiving other people's enjoyments, merit and wealth an uncomfortable feeling arises. The opposite of covetousness is to rejoice in whatever others have. Ill-will means the intention to harm others. This can be counteracted if we try to develop the intention to benefit others. Defining what is a wrong view causes some complication. What Buddhists consider a wrong view may be regarded as a correct view by other religions. Because this is a subtle point,

we will spend more time examining wrong view, the tenth negative action.

What does wrong view actually mean? Wrong view means to misapprehend the four noble truths. By studying and understanding the four noble truths, wrong views are automatically cleared away. The four noble truths are not beyond our understanding. Anyone who contemplates these topics can understand them. One need not be a philosopher and study innumerable books to gain a comprehension of the four noble truths: suffering, origin, cessation and path.

The first noble truth is to look at living beings and understand that they experience pain and suffering. The second noble truth is to search for what actually causes beings to suffer and feel misery, and to find it is the disturbing emotions and the resulting actions, called karma. The third noble truth is the fact that avoiding the causes that create suffering brings happiness. In Buddhist terms this cessation of the causes of suffering is called enlightenment, either the state of an arhant or a buddha. The fourth noble truth is the path, how to reach enlightenment. Can we reach the roof of a house in one instant or must we walk up the staircase? Obviously we must take certain steps to reach a certain point. In Buddhist terms, this is called following the path to enlightenment. Understanding the four noble truths we will be concerned about the law of cause and effect, and this concern will impel us to engage in Dharma practice.

We should train ourselves in a combined view and behavior that accords with the words of the Victorious One, the fully enlightened Buddha Shakyamuni. Some people deem the view less im-

portant, while considering one's conduct of extreme importance. To value conduct above the view is not the road to quick progress. That would be like being blind with a strong body. Walking fast but blindly, one will not reach the destination. On the other hand, having the eye of knowledge as well as a good body, we will reach our destination very soon.

Right now we are in the bardo of this life, the period between birth and death. How long will this situation last? That is uncertain; there is no guarantee how long we will remain alive. Already a good part of our life is behind us. We have grown up and we probably will not remain here much beyond the age of sixty or seventy. Therefore we should start counting our days.

Once ego-clinging is exhausted, all dualistic and confused experiences collapse and there is no need to go through any of the succeeding bardos. Nevertheless, as long as we retain ego-clinging, the idea of 'I' as a self-entity, there is always the idea of 'other,' of 'them' or 'that', and confused experience is perpetuated.

The most important bardo is that of this life. Everything that comes after depends on this life. The most important achievement in this life is liberation, enlightenment. If we cannot attain that, we should try to reach halfway; at the very least, we should have entered the path because then there will be more chances for liberation at the time of dying.

During the bardo of dharmata and the bardo of becoming we have additional opportunities for liberation. It is like the end of a football game with five minutes left. We still can score one more goal. But when the last second is up, then that chance is gone. Life is like that. We must be very careful how we

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spend the time we have left in the bardo of this life. Often people ask, "What should I do in the bardo? What practice should be done when I arrive in the state after death? The bardo of dharmata sounds especially interesting!" To pile up these teachings while not applying them in this life is totally useless. To gain some degree of mastery over our mind, some stability in practice right now is the key point for attaining liberation at the moment of death. Without having any practical experience during this life, the chances for liberation in the bardo of dharmata and especially in the bardo of becoming are very slight. Tsele Natsok Rangdröl emphasizes that what comes after death, the next three bardos, depends totally upon what one does in this life. If we attain the best results in practice right now, we will not have to worry about going through further bardos. If we have some degree of experience, we have a strong chance of becoming liberated at the moment of death or in the bardos thereafter. Therefore the bardo of this life, our present situation, is utterly crucial.

People tend to plan their Dharma practice, and especially like to dream of making a long retreat. We plan how the retreat hut should look, its shape and where it should be positioned; we plan the time to start our retreat, maybe one, two or three years from now. It is very easy to make such plans, but it is more difficult for these plans to become reality. Therefore it is more realistic to engage in Dharma practice today, right this moment, not tomorrow or next year. Practice now in whatever situation is at hand. Otherwise, your life can easily run out while planning to practice later. Do not make long-term plans.

The Bardo Guidebook

There is a saying, "The Dharma belongs to none but the diligent." Honestly, we are never prevented from practicing the teachings. It is totally in our own hands. Any moment of the day we can embrace Dharma practice, even when eating or going to the toilet. Having spent one's life planning while never applying the practice, it suddenly becomes too late. When the time of death comes, the one who had interest in Dharma practice but never did anything will be filled with regret. Some people on the verge of death even beat their chests in remorse.

Padmasambhava once said, "Those who feel as though they have plenty of time get busy at the time of death. They then feel strong regret, but it seems far too late" (p. 22). This means that it is futile to feel regret when it is too late. Therefore we must train ourselves in the ability to attain liberation in the bardos from this very moment.

Many think that the bardo is only what comes later, that it refers to the intense and terrifying experiences after death. Actually, we are already in a bardo state. Train in the practices now. It is of vital importance to study, reflect, meditate and gain direct experience. Especially, train in the awareness that recognizes emptiness.

The Buddhist teachings that were propagated in Tibet are known as the Eight Great Chariots of the Practice Lineage, each applying practices in a system that is the unity of Sutra and Tantra. These days the four schools of Kagyü, Nyingma, Sakya and Gelug still survive and flourish.

The essential meditation practice is Madhyamika, Mahamudra or Dzogchen. We should apply the essential teachings before it is too late. Tsele Rinpoche says that having received the oral instructions, what-

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ever Dharma practice one chooses, one has entered the door in accordance with one's particular karma and potential. Our practices should therefore bring our being to maturity and liberation. The meaning is that we should practice whatever we have received teachings on; it does not matter whether it's Hinayana, Mahayana or Vajrayana. Focus on the teachings you have received and on applying them personally.

DHARMA PRACTICE

The previous chapter emphasized three points: how to identify the bardo of this life, how this bardo appears to ordinary deluded people who have not engaged in much practice, and how the results and benefits of spiritual practice during the bardo of this life are experienced by people who have perfected the path through learning, reflection and meditation. In the course of these explanations I briefly mentioned the instructions on how to practice during the bardo of this life. I will now explain these instructions in more detail.

In order to gain liberation in this lifetime through Vajrayana practice, three things are indispensable: the ripening empowerments, the liberating instructions and the supportive reading transmissions. In this context, reading transmission means the full permission to use a certain text that is obtained when a lineage holder reads the text aloud.

Concerning the ripening empowerments, Tsele Rinpoche scolds both the teachers and practitioners of his day and age. He first describes the teachers, saying, "Empowerment, as most of the masters of the present dark age perform the ritual, rarely accords with the tantras and the tradition of the vidyadhara forefathers" (p. 22). There are superior, mediocre and inferior masters. Tsele Rinpoche is saying that infe-

rior teachers only give empowerments for personal gain, such as material wealth, reputation, prestige and so forth. Furthermore, the students who request empowerments very often want them only for worldly purposes. They hope to gain protection against the temporal harms of sickness or demonic obstacles, or to gain status, companionship, wealth or long life. Many people receive empowerment only for the prestige, to be regarded as a member of a certain class of practitioners. They may wear a special kind of dress, carry a rosary in their hand or don a peaked hat, but in fact their aim is not really to apply these teachings. Some attend empowerment gatherings to find a girlfriend or boyfriend; some merely come to see what is going on— who the teacher is, how he looks, how many people come, what they wear and so on. Some come just for entertainment, as if an initiation is a theater performance. There is not much benefit in such motivation.

We need to adopt the right motivation: with strong faith from the bottom of our heart we should wish to attain liberation from samsara and the omniscient state of buddhahood in order to ripen the unripened and to liberate the unliberated. We should attend teachings and empowerments out of the wish to attain enlightenment quickly for the benefit of others. This should be our sole intention.

For real empowerment and transmission to take place it is crucial that both the master and the disciple be qualified. Disciples must possess certain characteristics to be worthy recipients of the teachings. They must be sincere; it is not enough just to pretend to be worthy. The disciple must have genuine faith and devotion. Concurrently, the master must

have realized whatever appears and exists, the world and beings, to be the mandala of the deity.

Transmission means that something is passed on from the master to disciple; it is not a physical or concrete entity that is handed over, but something more subtle. It is like when two candles touch; if one is already ablaze, the other ignites by merely touching the flame of the first. To be a worthy recipient we must be like a candle that is ready to catch fire, not one with a wet, weak wick. All the conducive conditions should be present. Transmission automatically takes place when those conditions coincide during empowerment.

What is the real purpose of empowerment? Empowerment means that some realization occurs in the student. If no insight takes place or if some degree of understanding fails to dawn in the mind of the student, then there is only the blessing of having participated in the empowerment. This type of benefit can only dispel the obstacles of temporary circumstances. Insight is what empowerment is really about.

Unless some degree of insight takes place during the empowerment, the ritual is just child's play. Tibetan children put things on their heads and pretend they are giving empowerments to each other, but when grown-ups look at this, they see it is just a game and silly to regard it as real. Similarly, an empowerment ceremony in which both master and disciple are involved in deceit or parody is obviously not an effective means for ripening a person's mind.

The four empowerments introduce four levels of insight. Usually these four are given gradually, over the course of several years. Some people, however, need not be given the four empowerments separately, as they are capable of simultaneously realizing

the understanding introduced in them. This was the case with King Indrabodhi, who is the example of 'understanding and liberation occurring simultaneously.'

The first empowerment is called the vase empowerment. At the time of receiving the vase empowerment, we should recognize appearance as inseparable from emptiness. This means to realize that whatever appears, all experience, is unreal and illusory. Receiving the second empowerment, the secret empowerment, we should gain some insight into the unity of clarity and emptiness. The third empowerment, the wisdom empowerment, is given by means of a mental consort or *karmamudra*, by which we realize the unity of bliss and emptiness. With the fourth, the precious word empowerment, we should totally merge with the single sphere of dharmakaya, the real Mahamudra or Dzogchen, the natural state in which all phenomena of samsara and nirvana, whatever appears and exists, is totally beyond arising, dwelling and ceasing.

It is the tradition to arrange a perfect shrine with various symbols of enlightened body, speech and mind to be used during the empowerment. Nevertheless, when a qualified student and a perfect master meet, it is not crucial to have the correct ceremonial articles present. When the ritual objects are placed upon our head, we usually think, "Now, I receive the empowerment." But if we somehow missed the bonk on the head from an object, then we feel, "I missed something. I did not completely receive that empowerment." While this is often the case, the real transmission of the view of Mahamudra or Dzogchen does not depend upon whether the articles touch our

head. There is something more important. What is that?

To begin with, the whole point of receiving the empowerment is to gain insight, traditionally called 'realizing the wisdom that is the nature of the empowerment.' Unless that insight takes birth in our being, unless some understanding arises, the empowerment is not truly received. One may receive millions of empowerments and still fail to connect with the main point.

According to tradition, during the empowerment ceremony the master should sit on a lofty brocade-covered throne and be dressed in very elegant clothing. The disciples should have washed themselves and wear their best clothes and adornments. They should enter, prostrate and make offerings. There is often a traffic jam of offerings passing one way and ritual implements coming the other. The ceremony proceeds and reality is pointed out. I am not saying there is anything wrong with that style of conducting an empowerment. But if we miss the main point, the recognition of the insight that should occur during this elaborate affair, then the whole thing is just a charade. The main point is gaining insight, recognizing the wisdom that is the nature of the empowerment. Whether the empowerment is magnificent or plain is of secondary importance. If it must be elaborate to facilitate the occurrence of insight, then that is fine, but it is not the main point. There are stories from the past about great siddhas, such as Tilopa and Naropa, Marpa and Milarepa, who received empowerment in untraditional ways. We should read these in the English translations of their life stories.

One of my favorite stories is about Naropa and his teacher, Tilopa. When meeting Tilopa, Naropa was already a great scholar. He had studied a tremendous amount and acquired vast learning, but he felt that his understanding of Mahamudra was only intellectual and lacking direct experience. Repeatedly he begged Tilopa "Please give me the transmission. Please give me the pointing-out instruction, the empowerment of Mahamudra." Tilopa responded by completely ignoring him. He paid no attention to Naropa. In fact he treated Naropa terribly and put him through extreme hardship. Several times Tilopa sent Naropa into situations where he was beaten by other people. Then one day Tilopa took off his sandal and unexpectedly slapped Naropa across the face. Naropa was stunned for a moment but when he regained his senses his realization was equal to Tilopa's. That is one example of how empowerment can be transmitted without many elaborate articles. This story proves that transmission does not depend on a complex ceremony involving prostrations, supplications, a mandala on the shrine, and so on. Similar stories are found in the Nyingma lineage. When Shri Singha gave the transmission to Vairochana it was in a more pleasant way. He handed Vairochana an apple rather than slapping him with a sandal. It is said that Vairochana obtained the entire Dzogchen empowerment known as the 'expression of awareness' simply through that gesture of being handed an apple.

Then there is the story of Gampopa's meeting with Milarepa. Milarepa was a yogi while Gampopa was a monk keeping monastic precepts. When they met for the first time, Milarepa forced Gampopa to drink chang from a skull-cup. Gampopa hesitated,

thinking, "I am a monk. If I drink alcohol I break my vows. People are watching. What will they think? What will they say about me afterward?" But Milarepa just kept saying "Drink! Drink!" Without further thought Gampopa drank the chang, leaving no remainder, and in the same moment gained tremendous insight. Thus you can see there is no fixed rule as to how a qualified master should give empowerment to a qualified disciple. Empowerment does not depend upon a vase touching the top of our head or on being blessed with any special representation of enlightened body, speech or mind.

There is another story about Paltrül Rinpoche, some of whose teachings you have probably read. He was very learned and always engaged in practice. But people did not know that he was a great practitioner because he was often seen sleeping. He seemingly did nothing at all, was quite eccentric and often acted in unconventional, even outrageous, ways. Though he was realized, he would often come to another master's teachings incognito and sit in the back of the room. Most of the time he would lean back or lie down with eyes and mouth open. Often he would lie down outside, look up into the sky and do nothing.

On one occasion he was passing through the monastery in eastern Tibet known as Dzogchen Gompa, where a learned khenpo lived who had yet to experience deep confidence in the view. The khenpo asked Paltrül Rinpoche for the pointing-out instruction. His insistent requests were only met with Paltrül Rinpoche's feigned ignorance. The khenpo begged many times, saying, "Please give me empowerment. Please give me teachings!" Paltrül Rinpoche's response was simply to say, "Yeah, yeah. We will see!" Then he would then lie down outside and

look into the sky. The khenpo thought, "I regard him as my teacher and want to receive teachings. Maybe I should just act like him." So at the close of day he also went out and lay down and looked up at the sky with open eyes, open mouth, arms and legs spread out, completely relaxed. Then Paltrül Rinpoche said, "Hey, Khenpo! What do you see?" The khenpo said, "I see the sky." Paltrül replied, "Yeah, yeah." After some time Paltrül Rinpoche asked, "What do you see in the sky?" The khenpo replied, "I see the moon." Paltrül Rinpoche said "Yeah, very good!" After a few minutes Paltrül Rinpoche asked, "Do you hear the dogs barking at Dzogchen Monastery?" The khenpo said, "Yes, I hear the dogs barking too." This exchange of a few sentences was enough for the khenpo to receive the full transmission of the view. Afterward, he attained very high realization.¹

Having genuinely obtained the ripening empowerments, we also should receive the liberating instructions. They include the teachings on the Four Mind Changings, the general instructions on how to

1. More information about this story is found in *Buddha Mind* by Tulku Thondrup Rinpoche, Snow Lion Publications, Ithaca, N.Y. 1989 p. 127-128: Tulku Thondrup translates the khenpo's own words on this story: "At that moment I arrived at a certainty (of realization) from within. I had been liberated from the fetters of 'it is' and 'it is not.' I had realized the primordial wisdom, . . . emptiness and intrinsic awareness [united]. I was introduced to this realization by his blessing." As Saraha said: "He in whose heart the words of the master have entered sees (truth) like a treasure in his own palm." Tulku Thondrup's own commentary continues: "Afterward, when the words of (Paltrül Rinpoche) were (intellectually) examined, there was nothing much, but just his having said that the eye-consciousness and ear-consciousness are the intrinsic awareness. However, it should be understood that the introduction [pointing-out instruction] (to Dzogchen) took place (through these words) because of the transmission of blessing, the realization of the meaning of the Heart Essence."

turn one's mind away from samsara. These are followed by instructions on the special inner preliminaries. Afterward, we receive instructions on how to practice the development and completion stages.

The Four Mind Changings are essential for the practitioner. If we do not grasp the reality that samsara is pointless, we will be carried away by attraction to samsara's deluded experiences. Without wearying of samsara, we cannot engage in authentic practice. We must turn away from samsaric aims by taking to heart the Four Mind Changings: reflecting on the precious human body, impermanence and death, the cause and effect of karmic actions, and the defects of samsaric existence.

The first of the Four Mind Changings, reflecting on the importance of the precious human body, stresses the difficulty of obtaining a human body. The human body is the best possible support for practicing the Dharma. It is incredibly difficult to get a human birth and therefore very precious. Merely having obtained a human body is in itself not enough; it is impermanent and does not last for very long. Birth certainly is followed by death. Right now we treasure our body—we give it the best food and adorn it with nice clothing. Yet when the energies that sustain the body disappear, it is declared dead, begins to smell revolting and is disgusting to people. Nobody wants to touch our dead body; it will be disposed of as soon as possible. It's certain this physical body will die someday.

By reflecting on impermanence and death, we lose the confidence that we will live for a long time and feel the immediate need to practice. As a result we will not make long-range plans but try to use our time effectively.

Dharma Practice

What about karma? When we die our breathing ceases, the body is discarded and our possessions taken by others. All we retain is the karmic results of our past actions. What is the cause and effect of karma? What are the results of good and bad actions? These we must learn about. By understanding the relationship between the cause and effect of karmic actions—positive and negative deeds—we will be unmistakable about the way to practice the Dharma. That is called utilizing the law of cause and effect.

Where will our consciousness go after death? In which of the six realms will we be reborn? As long as we are encased in the habitual patterning of a deluded state of mind, no matter where we are born within the six imperfect realms of samsara, we will never be beyond suffering. Beings in the three lower realms of the hells, hungry ghosts and animals, experience only misery and suffering. Even the higher realms of gods, demigods and human beings lack perfect happiness. The vital point is that as long as we retain dualistic fixation and ego-clinging, rigidly holding on to the idea of self, we are always involved in deluded experience which makes suffering unavoidable. That which truly brings an end to the causes that perpetuate ego-clinging and deluded experience is the practice of the sacred Dharma. Therefore, to practice the Dharma is crucial. To study and apply the teachings is called utilizing our precious human body.

Having taken to heart these general instructions on the Four Mind Changings, we are ready for the special inner preliminaries of Vajrayana, known as the 'four times one hundred thousand practices' or *ngöndro*: refuge with prostrations and bodhisattva

vow, Vajrasattva recitation, mandala offerings, and guru yoga. Vajrayana is the vehicle of methods that are both skillful and free from hardship. These preliminary techniques can very quickly purify our misdeeds and obscurations of our body, speech and mind.

The famous statement, "When obscurations are purified, realization occurs spontaneously," reveals the whole purpose of purification practice, since that which prevents us from attaining realization is our karmic misdeeds and obscurations.

In Vajrayana, the vehicle of Secret Mantra, emphasis is placed on something called yidam practice. Through this practice, we approach the body, speech and mind of a perfect buddha. In order to be free of ego-clinging, which is difficult to immediately discard, we visualize the deity as a body of rainbow light, recite the deity's mantra and rest in the equanimity of enlightened mind. By familiarizing ourselves with the immaterial mental image of the deity the habit of clinging to concrete reality is diminished. Through visualization practice we ultimately obtain a body that is the unity of emptiness and luminosity.

Visualizing the form of the deity, reciting the mantra that is the voice of the deity and resting in the equanimity of the mind of the deity, we realize the nature of things. Why is this? It is because right now our body, speech and mind are by nature already the pure aspects of the three kayas, the state of enlightenment. We ordinarily perceive our body as a material form, our voice as a dualistic way of communicating and our mind as structured by dualistic thinking. Through the yidam practice we are introduced to and have the opportunity to recognize the pure nature of our body, speech and mind, which,

although obscured, is already present. This is the whole purpose of yidam practice: to realize the three kayas by uninterruptedly perceiving our body as the unity of appearance and emptiness, our voice as the unity of sound and emptiness and our mind as the unity of awareness and emptiness.

Having received empowerments and instructions from various masters, we may like to keep count and list our credentials. But just to think "I have received such and such," just to have the superficial confidence of having obtained a transmission, does not by itself bring liberation. The only reason for receiving teachings is to liberate our being. The ripening empowerments and liberating oral instructions should free our state of mind in the sense that disturbing emotions should diminish and the qualities of wisdom should increase. Take that as your infallible guideline. Our disturbing emotions do not diminish by collecting notes of the different titles of teachings and the empowerments that we received, while neglecting to put these instructions and transmissions into practice.

Liberation here means the abandonment of conceptual thinking, the collapse of deluded fixation. If we do not succeed in this we are like tea poured into a cracked cup; after a short time it leaks out. We must carefully investigate for ourselves the defects and suffering associated with ego-clinging and the grasping tendency of our mind. No one else can do it for us.

No matter what practice we apply, some signs should occur. In the context of ground, path and fruition, on the path, signs should manifest as a result of practice. After progressing on the path, the result of fruition should be obtained.

While the view of Vajrayana is very subtle and profound, we must also conduct ourselves carefully in all actions as well as in meditation practices. It is possible to go astray by misapprehending the teachings or becoming too fascinated by the various meditation experiences that may arise.

We can practice different levels of teachings, such as the three or nine vehicles, the four sections of Tantra and so forth. A good analogy for this abundance of methods is to consider the different countries of the world. Each culture has its own tradition for preparing and making food. If the cook is skillful the dish will be tasty while an inexperienced cook may create awful food. When applying the different levels of teaching, if the teacher is competent and the student qualified, then even though the prescribed teaching may belong to the path of a shravaka, which takes a long time, the student will eventually attain the result of that practice which is liberation from samsaric existence. On the other hand, if the teacher is unqualified and the practitioner is neither sharp nor diligent, then even if the student is given a Vajrayana practice, liberation can take much longer than if he were practicing Hinayana methods.

No matter which path or level of teaching one practices, the speed and efficacy depends solely upon the individual. Through perseverance in the teachings of the shravakas, the Hinayana system, one can certainly attain liberation. On the other hand, to practice Vajrayana with a view that is only theoretical, not directly experienced, while maintaining behavior that does not even approach the Hinayana standard, will produce a result that is immensely harmful.

The vital point in all the different Vajrayana practices is to recognize unconditioned wakefulness, the unity of bliss and emptiness. Although our physical body is material and composed of the five elements, it is possible to ripen these constituents into the pure rainbow body. Within this very lifetime it is possible to achieve the unified state of the two kayas that are of one taste in the nonarising space of dharmakaya, the absolute essence of cognizance.

As the heart of all liberating instructions, the Dzogchen teachings include several sections: the outer Mind Section, the inner Space Section and the secret Instruction Section. In addition, there are subdivisions such as Ati, Chiti and Yangti, each more profound than the preceding one. But all the key points can simply be included within two aspects: Trekchö and Tögal.

Trekchö, Cutting Through, means to cut through thought occurrence, thereby revealing naked awareness. Trekchö is the practice of the unity of awareness and emptiness. Having gained some degree of stability in Trekchö, the practice of Tögal is added to enhance realization. Tögal, Direct Crossing, is the practice of the unity of appearance and emptiness. Through certain key points used in Tögal practice, visual manifestations begin to occur in one's experience. These manifestations will eventually reach a degree of fullness and finally completely disappear.

Dzogchen has two systems of transmission: the oral lineage called Kama and the treasure lineage called Terma. It does not matter which system we practice, because the teachings are the same. It is essential that we receive the instructions in their totality from a qualified master and then apply them assiduously in secluded places.

Essentially, the view of Trekchö is identical with the final view of Madhyamika that is totally free from the eight constructs and four extremes. By repeatedly resting evenly in the state without mental formulations or fixation, our mind's negative aspects of disturbing emotions and thought activity are slowly exhausted and the enlightened qualities begin to manifest and increase. The key point is not to follow after the thoughts of the three times, but to rest in vivid, naked awareness.

According to the Mahamudra system, by resting without rigidly meditating and without being distracted, our thoughts of the three times, deluded experiences and disturbing emotions that obstruct recognizing the nature of mind will gradually cease, and we realize nonconceptual wisdom. At that time, the enlightened qualities begin to increase.

Chokgyur Lingpa, a close disciple of Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo and Kongtrül Lodrö Thaye, succinctly said, "When abandoning the watcher in awareness itself, there is utter emptiness free from color and shape." When we start to investigate and look into exactly what our mind is and what the watcher is, it is impossible to pinpoint any concrete thing with a particular shape or color; it cannot be identified or held on to in any way whatsoever. We cannot say that our mind exists; we cannot say it does not exist. We cannot say it is a combination of existence and nonexistence or that it is neither of these. It is impossible to make any final statement at all about it. Chokgyur Lingpa continues, "When not fixating on the thought 'It is empty!', that is the moment of seeing the nature of mind." To retain the idea that we are experiencing the empty essence of mind is still a subtle, dualistic fixation. When that

fixation has also been relinquished, when we let go of the idea "This is empty," the moment of seeing the nature of mind emerges. This again is the view of Trekchö, Cutting Through.

The main term used in the Mahamudra system is 'ordinary mind.' It is a very important word. Why is it that we are unable to rest in the ultimate view, the nature of mind? It is simply because of our inability to sustain the innate stability of ordinary mind. Without training, we are unable to maintain unfabricated naturalness. What is it that obscures this ordinary mind, our buddha nature? It is our distracted thought movements. Thinking is the root cause for all dualistic clinging and disturbing emotions. In short, the view of Mahamudra, ordinary mind, is immediately realized the very moment we are free from mental fabrication.

While the approaches to the three views of Madhyamika, Mahamudra and Dzogchen are slightly different, their end results are identical. Mahamudra and Dzogchen emphasize the pointing-out instruction, the introduction to mind essence, whereas the Madhyamika system approaches ultimate truth through intellectual analysis. Having repeatedly examined the subject, object and mind and failed to find anything that is truly existent, the absence of true existence becomes evident. By resting in the nature of that absence of true existence, it is possible to arrive at the same realization as the other two views.

While one needs some degree of faith and open-mindedness in order to engage in the analytical meditation of a scholar, faith is indispensable in the Mahamudra and Dzogchen practice called the resting meditation of a simple practitioner. That is why the

Buddha said in one of the Prajnaparamita scriptures, "Shariputra, the ultimate truth is realized exclusively by means of faith." Ultimate truth is realized through strong faith and compassion.

The main point of the bardo of this life is to receive instructions in a proper way from a qualified master, no matter which lineage. The "proper way" is to become totally free from doubts, misunderstandings and ignorance about the teachings. Do not let your understanding remain vague or uncertain. Clarify it again and again with your teacher and become clear about how to practice correctly and the purpose of practice. Having received the oral instructions in full you can then go to a secluded place and practice on your own. As I mentioned earlier, circumstances have an effect. One is influenced by living in a place where people are very attached. Living alone, no one can influence us; we may feel lonely, but that is all. In such a situation we can concentrate one hundred percent on practicing the oral instructions.

In short, all those who reached perfect accomplishment in one lifetime through the profound teachings of the Eight Practice Lineages that flourished in Tibet, such as Mahamudra, Dzogchen, Lamdrey, Jordruk and so forth, were liberated in that very body without having to go through any further bardos. They attained enlightenment in one lifetime. That is the actual measure for perfecting the practice of the bardo of this life. However, these days, very few people of this kind can be found in the New or Old Schools. In any case, since we indeed have buddha nature, if we practice one-pointedly according to these teachings there is little doubt that we can attain

complete enlightenment within this very lifetime, just as many practitioners of the past did.

How much time do we really have? A short time actually; there is almost no time at all. So what will be of lasting benefit? Only by remaining in the egoless state of nonconceptual wakefulness can we put a halt to circling in samsara, life after life, birth after birth, be liberated from confusion and attain the unsurpassable state of enlightenment. The cause for attaining this unsurpassable state of enlightenment is to cultivate insight into emptiness.

The time we have now is so very precious that we must use this opportunity while body and mind are still together. During this particular time we control our destiny. Therefore, if we are diligent in practice, both body and mind will benefit. The more capable we are of sustaining insight into emptiness, the closer we are to accomplishing enlightenment. If we neglect this opportunity, then at death when our body and mind have separated we will wander through the ensuing bardos and liberation will be difficult. Not trying to accomplish enlightenment now, when the body and mind are together, is a big mistake.

THE PAINFUL BARDO OF DYING

What has been taught up till now? First we examined the bardo of this life: what it actually means, how it appears to both ordinary people and to people who are practitioners. I also taught what we can do during this bardo, what instructions we must receive, and finally how to apply these teachings once they are received. To understand these vital points of advice and what they entail is called developing the knowledge that results from learning. Thinking about them and becoming clear about the pertinent instructions is called developing the knowledge that results from reflection. Once you apply the teachings in your own life and embody them in personal experience, you develop what is called the knowledge that results from meditation.

The second topic is called the painful bardo of dying. The bardo of dying is said to be painful because the process of passing away usually involves pain and suffering. Although the death process might sometimes be very quick and we may think that nothing much is felt, some pain is certainly involved. Even if one dies in a coma or during a faint, the mind still experiences subtle pain during what is called the interruption of the life-force. This term

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refers to the destruction of the life channel where the prana that supports the physical body dwells. When that circulation is destroyed, some degree of pain is felt.

This second bardo, the painful bardo of dying, will again be explained under three headings: first, what it actually is, next, how it is experienced, and finally, how to apply the instructions to deal with it.

There are countless causes and numerous circumstances of death. Sometimes the circumstances of death are negative, but sometimes even positive circumstances such as medicine being improperly administered can result in death. According to the Buddhist medical tradition, illness arises due to imbalances between the three components, wind, phlegm and bile. In such cases an illness or a combination of diseases can strike the physical body, sometimes with fatal consequences. The three disturbing emotions of attachment, anger and delusion can take on the form of evil influences that cause fear, discomfort and even death. Regardless of whether death results from an imbalance in the three basic components or the evil influences of the mind poisons, all these negativities are basically caused by ego-clinging, the tendency to hold on to the idea of self.

There are two primary causes of death: either our time has run out or temporary circumstances result in death. When our life span has reached its end, nothing more can be done; death is unavoidable. However if a temporary circumstance threatens our life, we can resort to different remedies, such as following a medicinal cure or having special ceremonies performed. Through these we can sometimes avert death temporarily.

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Sometimes when we are very sick we may feel "Now I am going to die!" We might interpret the different experiences arising from the illness to mean that death is approaching. Actually, certain texts exactly describe the definite outer, inner and secret signs that indicate the proximity of death. Most people do not really like to study these texts because they explain very clearly the signs indicating whether one will die after exactly six years, after exactly three years, after six months, or even during the coming month. We cannot look far into the future, but the next six years can be known quite clearly.

Certain outer, inner and secret signs indicate that death is imminent. First of all, since the body was formed by the five elements, a strong imbalance in these elements occurs at the onset of the death process and at this time no amount of medicine will help.

Some death signs are clearer on certain days of the lunar month. For example, usually when we press our closed eyelids a tiny bit of light and color appears. If on the first day of the month that has disappeared, it is an indication that death is coming soon. Furthermore, there is normally a kind of very subtle ringing sound or resonance in our ears. If that is no longer heard, this is another indication that death is approaching. There are quite a few other signs as well. Examinations that presage death can also be made based on examinations of menstrual blood or semen. Those are outer signs.

Inner signs occur in one's dreams. Dreams are usually unreliable and beyond credibility, but death signs are fairly obvious. Sometimes particular inauspicious dreams will occur again and again in the early morning. For example, night after night one

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may repeatedly dream of putting on black robes and traveling in a downward direction. One may dream of encountering and riding downhill on the back of a wild animal such as a tiger or leopard, or entering a dark area where everything becomes black. These dreams foretell one's death.

Furthermore, if one is very sick and dreams again and again that the sun and the moon are sinking in the sky, that is a sign that one will die. But to experience such dreams while in good health is a sign that one's root teacher is about to die or that an obstacle has arisen to threaten the root teacher's life.

A secret sign of approaching death is that our disposition and character begin to change. Someone previously gentle and kind suddenly becomes very irritable and easily angered. Neither acts of kindness nor admonishments from others seem to help in such a case.

When such signs occur a practitioner will understand that death is near. If he or she has not yet been liberated in the bardo of this life, the practitioner should then concentrate one hundred percent on practice, knowing that the time is up. Supplicate your root teacher and all the lineage masters, mingle your mind with their wisdom mind, generate compassion for all sentient beings, and then simply rest in the natural state. By doing so you will have a strong opportunity for liberation during the bardo of dying.

This practice of mingling the mind of the teacher with one's own has a profound purpose. The mind of a qualified master abides uninterruptedly in the non-conceptual state of wakefulness that is naturally endowed with great compassion. With the openness of faith, make this supplication: "May the realized mind

of all the buddhas and the mind of my teacher right now clear away the disturbing emotions concealing my nature!" Having made such a supplication from the core of your heart, you can certainly attain some degree of realization. This is due to the connection between the blessings of the master's enlightened mind, your own openness of faith and the truth of dharmata which is the natural state of wakefulness.

What is the painful bardo of dying? The first section in the chapter is called identifying the essence. "It is the whole period from the time one is afflicted by the sickness that will cause one's death, whatever it may be, until the true luminosity of dharmata, the first bardo, has arisen" (p. 27). There is some discussion as to whether the true luminosity of the ground belongs at the end of the bardo of dying or at the beginning of the bardo of dharmata. In *The Mirror of Mindfulness* the author follows the Dzogchen system in which this luminosity occurs at the onset of the bardo of dharmata. Here, however, we will consider it as occurring at the end of the bardo of dying.

The superior type of person mentioned above who is liberated in this lifetime need not go through the other bardos. The Dzogchen teachings state: "As space within and without mingle together when a vase breaks, so body and mind dissolve into the emptiness of dharmakaya" (p. 27).

In this example, essentially there is no difference between the space within a vase and the space without, except for the degree of vastness. So if a practitioner has realized the view of simplicity, his physical body may very well be made up of flesh and blood, but in essence there is no difference between his realization and the state of enlightenment. It is only that the kayas and wisdoms are not yet fully mani-

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fest. When the vase breaks, meaning when the physical body disintegrates at the time of death, the wisdoms and kayas will manifest. The main point of a superior practitioner is that he need not undergo the dissolution stages.

“The mediocre yogin has three ways of dying: like a small child, like a wandering beggar and like a lion” (p. 28). Like a small child means that there is no concept of dying or not dying. Dying like a wandering beggar means that one does not care about the circumstances of death.

Some people are extremely sad when passing away because they cannot bear to leave their relatives. Parents with small children especially feel like this. They are heartbroken because they are leaving their children forever, not just for a short time. The separation is permanent. Therefore it is good to be like Milarepa and make aspirations as he did: “When I die, may I die alone without anybody to cry, without any relatives to mourn. May I die in solitude so that no one will see the corpse afterwards.” Having cut attachments to circumstances is called dying like a lion. When the lion knows it is about to die, it goes into solitude to die alone.

In the first two cases, superior practitioners and mediocre yogins have recognized mind essence, have trained in it and have gained a full or partial degree of stability. When passing away they do not need anyone else. It is better for them to be without disturbances so that they can liberate their minds. But the least skillful kind of practitioner needs some reminder: at best, one’s teacher should be present when we die so that he can say, “This and this is happening. Do not be attached; do not be distracted,” and so forth. Next best is to be with a Dharma friend

with whom we have shared teachings and gotten along with very well. If someone we didn't like is reading the teachings aloud at our deathbed, we may become irritated and angry. Instead of benefiting, this will create an obstacle. It is better to have a person one has never met before read the teachings aloud. According to the Nyingma lineage, there are many instructions to be read aloud to a dying person such as *The Liberation Through Hearing in the Bardo*.

When the best practitioners are passing away, they do not give others a chance to read the teachings aloud. They remain alone to attain rainbow body. There is no need to remind them of anything. The next-best practitioners may be reminded or not, it does not really matter. Nothing changes the fact that they will be liberated. But the least skilled practitioner needs the benefit of instructions to remind them at the time of dying. These do not always have to be very elaborate. For some Dzogchen practitioners, it is enough to simply repeat the syllable AH in their presence.

The Mirror of Mindfulness is aimed mainly at the inferior type of practitioner. The superior and the mediocre practitioners do not need this information. That does not mean that we must remain inferior practitioners. Having studied these teachings, we can of course progress. Let nothing prevent that. But we must always start at the bottom of the staircase and climb one step at a time.

"In general, the body of all beings is first formed by means of the five elements" (p. 28). As the powers of the five elements develop, the embryo takes shape in the mother's womb. From a small blob, the head, arms and so forth are slowly formed. After one is

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born, one also subsists by means of the five elements. The reason why the physical body finally perishes is that the powers of the elements begin to subside. For example, if we lose a finger, the power or sensation that the finger once possessed has been withdrawn into the body. When the powers of the elements have fully dissolved, the body dies and starts to decompose.

The body possesses five main pranas or winds, as well as the different wheels or chakras in which these winds move. At death these pranas begin to disintegrate, one after the other. This process is accompanied by certain outer, inner and secret experiences.

One of the five main winds is called the equal-abiding wind. When that ceases to function, one is unable to digest food. At this time one can only drink liquids. The warmth in one's body also starts to disappear. This means that the body heat withdraws from the feet and the hands and one gradually becomes colder and colder until finally, warmth remains only in the heart. Even though the feet and arms might be cold, as long as one's heart remains warm, one has not yet died. When the heart grows cold then this life is over.

"The disappearance of the life-upholding wind makes one's mind unclear and confused" (p. 29). When the life-wind begins to disappear one starts to have different kinds of hallucinations and to feel nervous and frightened. One is extremely uncomfortable. This can also happen during normal life when extra wind enters into the subtle nadi at one's heart. Tibetan doctors call this *nying-lung* meaning heart wind. It tends to make people neurotic or fearful.

When the downward-moving wind begins to disappear, normal automatic body functions such as control over urination and defecation become diffi-

cult. One can no longer choose when to let go or not let go. This can be quite unpleasant.

“The disappearance of the upward-moving wind,” another of the five main pranas, “makes one unable to swallow any food or drink.” It becomes very difficult to consume liquids and one is short of breath. When people are about to die the breathing grows irregular and shallow. Exhalations are very long but it is difficult to inhale. A gasp or rattle, like a very short breath, develops.

When the pervading wind that gives the muscles power to move disappears, one’s body becomes like a corpse even though one has not yet died. One cannot even lift an arm, and eventually not even one finger. One’s body is paralyzed.

“The beginning of the destruction of the nadi wheels is the disintegration of the nadi wheel of the navel. After that, step by step, the disappearance of the supporting wind makes the earth element dissolve into the water element” (p. 29). The supporting wind is that which creates physical vigor. Its disappearance is the first step in the dissolution of the elements and is accompanied by outer, inner and secret signs. The outer sign is the loss of physical strength. One becomes very heavy and cannot move. The neck can no longer support the head. The legs can no longer support the body. The hand can no longer hold a plate of food, and the skin loses color and radiance. The face becomes pale and takes on an ugly, mouldy, colorless texture. Stains collect on the teeth. One cannot contain saliva and nasal mucus drips out. Another sign is that the nostrils draw inward and the face takes on a hollow appearance. The eyes that usually have some shine become lackluster.

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The inner signs concern one's state of mind. The dying person becomes dull and feels mentally heavy and obscured. Thinking that this is caused by physical circumstances, he asks people, "Please take the blankets off. Remove some of my clothes. Lift me up a little." He feels as if he is sinking into the earth.

In short, the dying person grows pale and feels great anxiety. His voice changes and talking is difficult. His eyes lose focus and roll back in his head, showing the whites. People present start to feel uncomfortable just looking at his face.

Practitioners watch for the secret signs, the visual experiences resembling smoke, mirages, fireflies and so on, and pay close attention to them, whereas ordinary people will not even notice. Although the secret signs of luminosity are vague, like a mirage, a practitioner will recognize them. Focusing on the practice in which he has trained during this life, he will now be able to progress.

The next nadi-wheel to disintegrate is that of the heart chakra. At the same time the radiance-producing wind makes the water element dissolve into the fire element. The outer signs of this are that one's mouth and tongue become dry. The mouth becomes clogged and the lips become pale, white and shrunken. Usually when we stick out our tongue we can see the tip, but now that is impossible. Normally when we raise our hand in front of our face we can see a portion of our wrist, but at this time we will be unable to see that. At this point death is quite near.

"The inner signs are that one is bewildered and has various visions" (p. 30). One's mind becomes very unclear and hazy. Sometimes one recognizes the people around one, but sometimes one blacks out and is unaware of what is going on. One feels "I am

still alive," but in the very next moment everything is vague and hazy.

The various hallucinations are in accordance with one's basic character: evil-minded people will perceive terrifying visions and become frightened, while practitioners who have better karma and a purer frame of mind might have very delightful visions. They might see beautiful scenery or their root teacher might appear before them as if in person and confer upon them the four empowerments so that they attain realization. Actually, this point indicates what kind of practitioner one has been during the bardo of this life.

The Mirror of Mindfulness (p. 28-31) clearly describes the dissolution of the elements and their corresponding experiences. The dissolution of the gross and subtle thoughts is a bit more complicated and warrants detailed explanation. To fully comprehend these experiences one needs to become familiar with the terms appearance, increase and attainment, which are usually called the three experiences of whiteness, redness and blackness. A practitioner should know what these experiences actually are. Whiteness or appearance is due to the descent of the white element, obtained from one's father at the moment of conception. At that time there is a white, shimmering light like moonshine. The outer sign is similar to the moon descending or rising. The inner sign is that one's consciousness feels hazy like a mirage. This should be acknowledged as the experience of whiteness.

The experience of redness involving the ascent of the red element obtained from one's mother at conception is like sunshine in a place filled with dust so that the sun appears very red. The outer sign is a

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red sun either rising or setting. The inner sign is scintillating sparks that appear and disappear like fireflies. The experience of blackness is like the darkness of the night sky. At this point, one's consciousness alternates between being clear and hazy.¹

The three experiences, appearance, increase and attainment initially take place when the consciousness is conceived, as the egg of our mother unites with the sperm of our father. When passing away, these are the last three experiences that occur before the consciousness detaches itself from the physical body.

1. According to the oral instructions of Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche: "The dissolution of the elements is before the real death takes place. There are gross, subtle and very subtle dissolution stages. The gross ones are felt by everybody. It is before the breathing stops, the dissolution of the five elements. First the earth element starts to disintegrate. One feels very heavy. That's when people say "Please lift me up, raise me up. I feel like I'm sinking." When the water element dissolves then one feels very cold and says "Please warm me up. It's too cold in here." When the fire element dissolves one feels very thirsty and wants water, one's lips are drying up. When the wind element dissolves one feels as if one is floating at the brink of an abyss, not anchored anywhere. When consciousness dissolves into space it means that everything grows very big and completely ungrounded. The outer breath has stopped but the inner breathing is still taking place.

"The subtle dissolution stage is the three experiences of appearance, increase and attainment. They occur after the outer breathing stops. The inner breathing, the inner circulation of prana hasn't ceased yet. For most people it doesn't take very long; it's just one, two, three. The redness experience is like the redness of a setting sun spreading throughout one's vision. The whiteness is like moonlight and the blackness is like everything going completely dark. At the moment when the white and red elements converge in the heart center, the unity of bliss and emptiness, either one goes unconscious, or if one is a practitioner who has familiarity with the state of rigpa, there is the fourth moment of the ground luminosity of full attainment which is the same as primordial purity. The rigpa is not unconscious, but for people not familiar with the state of rigpa then there is nothing but a blackout. For the yogi who has some stability in rigpa there is the great possibility of enlightenment right there. The fourth moment, the ground luminosity, is the same as primordial purity, dharma-kaya. Attaining stability in that very moment is complete enlightenment." (Extracted from *Repeating the Words of the Buddha*, forthcoming from Rangjung Yeshe Publications).

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At this moment, we should recognize the essential nature of these experiences. When we fail to recognize their essence, their manifestations are the three poisons, attachment, anger and delusion, through which we fall unconscious and take rebirth.²

Moreover, the nature of the five poisons in their pure aspect is actually the five wisdoms. In essence, the white element can be equated with mirror-like wisdom. The red element can be equated with the wisdom of equality. The consciousness is accompanied by the movement of prana or wind, which in essence is the discriminating wisdom. All of these can be combined into one entity, the all-accomplishing wisdom. The complete body created through that is the dharmadhatu wisdom.

Lacking understanding of this, consciousness takes on a physical form and enters another impure rebirth in samsaric existence. But with understanding, one takes pure rebirth within the manifestation of the five wisdoms and gains liberation. To realize the pure aspect of things is the main objective of Vajrayana.

2. Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche continues: "The crucial point in the context of the two elements converging in the heart center, is the experience of the fourth moment, rigpa. The experience of the white and red elements joining together is the same experience that grabbed the consciousness out of the bardo and into this life to begin with. It occurred when one was conceived into the womb at the time that the mother's and father's red and white elements joined together. In that moment of bliss-emptiness the consciousness faints and is then conceived. Therefore it's extremely important to not fall oblivious and to remain detached." (From *Repeating the Words of the Buddha*.)

HOW TO DIE

We must acknowledge the impermanence of all conditioned things and especially that human life is fleeting. By doing so, we understand that it is crucial to prepare ourselves for death. What is it that dies at the moment of dying? It is our body and speech that die; the mind can never die. It is our mind that continues to wander through samsaric existences, not our present body or voice. Only that which benefits our state of mind can be of help at the time of death. To concentrate on what is truly valuable when dying is considered intelligent, whereas to only worry about physical comfort is quite foolish. By all means, make some preparation for the moment when your life has come to an end.

The worst misfortune is to know how to take advantage of one's present situation but fail to do so. We all know that there is an end to this life, but no one knows the exact moment when it will happen. The time of death arrives without warning. Of course, to have a guaranteed life-span of seventy years would be very convenient. We could plan to spend a certain number of years on mundane projects, thinking, "After that I will focus on Dharma practice and everything will work out very nicely." But we do not know when death will come. The time of death can catch up with us at any moment.

Usually we think that only old people with a lot of wrinkles and grey hair are close to death, while youngsters with sparkling eyes and radiant complexions will not die soon. There is actually no such guarantee. Sometimes just the opposite happens: people who are already old remain for a long time while young people suddenly die.

What is of real value when we arrive at the moment of death? It is personal experience in Dharma practice: the practices of purifying obscurations, gathering the two accumulations, and especially our insight into egolessness and emptiness, our training in the view free from mental constructs. Other than that, whatever benefits we acquire such as money, fame and worldly accomplishments, or anything else that is greatly valued during this lifetime is totally useless at the moment of death. The chief support is our understanding of egolessness.

We should ask ourselves, "What will help me when I die?" When we have difficulties now, we can turn for help to family and friends. When we are sick we can consult a doctor. But at the moment of death who can we see? Who can we turn to for help? We should ask ourselves these questions. When we honestly think about this it becomes clear only the results of our Dharma practice will help at that time. We should immediately prepare for the moment of death.

We can spend years studying whatever religion or school of thought is of interest to us. Even within Buddhism different philosophies and different levels of teachings exist. But simply studying these teachings, thinking about them and clarifying them in our mind, is not enough to be of true value at the moment of death. Only the application of teachings in

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personal experience through meditation practice will help; words and theories have no great value when facing death. Give thought to that now and know that only practical understanding and real meditation experience can help you at the time of death.

A small child does not make long-term plans or look very far ahead. If his immediate needs are attended to, then the child is happy and content. The attempt to avoid seeing what will come is childish. But many grownups act in this way, concentrating only on fulfilling immediate needs, fickle-mindedly running after whatever is in front of their noses and giving no thought to preparing for death. Then death arrives suddenly and it is too late.

Even while engaging in so-called Dharma practice there are many ways in which we can deceive ourselves. We can fool ourselves by spending our whole life gaining an intellectual comprehension of the structure of the Dharma teachings, memorizing all the stages of the path, the bodhisattva bhumis and the different levels of meditation experience. We can become very learned in the details of the Four Tantras, such as the complete structure of the tantric approach and all the rituals. However, this type of intellectual understanding is of little value at the time of death. Furthermore, we may become very skilled in debate if we have a sharp mind and a good tongue. We can excel at challenging the different arguments, refuting objections to the teachings and so forth. But that kind of competence is also useless when it comes to dying. What is really important now is to practice in order to realize egolessness. Just being able to talk about egolessness without practical experience is to fool yourself.

Religious people might be very successful in gathering followers, building temples and representations of the enlightened body, speech and mind, taking care of many disciples and giving teachings. But if they lack personal conviction about the state of nonconceptual wakefulness, the very essence of Dharma practice, then at the moment of death they will still have doubts, regrets, grasping and attachment. Do not let that happen to you.

When death approaches, abandon all attachment to spouse, children and parents, friends and relatives, possessions and property. To ensure liberation, completely cut all ties of clinging to these things. That does not mean that we should cut off love for other people such as close relatives. Love is genuine when it is compassionate kindness embraced by bodhichitta and not strangled by attachment. Ordinary love that is mixed with attachment, anger and delusion is a cause for further entanglements and binds us to samsaric existence, whereas the love embraced by the great passion that is wisdom and compassion inseparable is a cause for liberation and enlightenment. This type of love is a million times more precious than ordinary affection for others. Ordinary love and affection is quite fickle, whereas the love that is embraced by bodhichitta and insight into emptiness is unchanging.

It does not matter what the object of attachment is. It can be attachment to ordinary things, even one's shoes; or attachment to one's body and life, country and home, or to gold and silver. Even attachment to religious objects such as one's statues and texts is still attachment. The main point here is to leave no object of attachment for your mind to fixate on at the time of death. It is better to give

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away whatever you have, either to poor people, friends, relatives or to your teacher. Make sure no material thing remains to which your mind can be attached. We should be without possessions when we know that the time of death is near. It is best to give away everything. That will make it much easier at the time of death as one of the main obstacles to resting in the composure of meditation will have been cleared away.

At the time of death we should have exhausted all plans, whether virtuous or evil. For example, although we may not have succeeded in getting ahead of our competitors, we should not worry about that at the time of death. We should also give up any idea of seeing a particular relative or a close friend one last time. Maybe there is an enemy we would like to see in order to have the last word; we should completely abandon such aims. There are stories of people who could not let go and die because they wanted to witness one last attack on their enemy. Even half dead, they still would not let themselves die out of anger, spite or a grudge. They wanted a last chance to take revenge. Only after hearing that the other party had died could they finally relax and pass away. We should not be like that. Let absolutely nothing unfinished capture your thoughts.

At the moment of death our frame of mind or the thought that we hold can become extremely intense, much stronger than usual. In ordinary life we have outer sense impressions that distract us from our feelings of anger. A person who is insane can become completely engrossed in one thought or emotion and magnify it to a tremendous degree. The same can happen at the moment of death. Because we may experience an intense degree of resentment

or regret, it is very important to clear the mind of anything that could cause remorse. For example, if one has broken the vows belonging to any of the three vehicles, it is important to admit and apologize either mentally or to an actual person. Rid your mind of any such regret so that nothing is left that can linger on. Do not be hindered by what you were unable to accomplish; then everything will be much easier.

The best circumstance is if our master can be physically present while we are passing away, because then we can take initiation or receive the pith instructions again, clarify any last point of uncertainty, and be totally confident about the correct view. Moreover, due to the link between the powerful blessings of the teacher's realized mind and our own genuine faith and unfabricated devotion, it is much easier to recognize the view, the natural state of Mahamudra or Dzogchen. Understanding this correct view ensures liberation. Having the correct view at the moment of dying is a tremendous advantage; in fact, it is the very best of circumstances.

If your teacher cannot be physically present, the next-best situation is to have a close Dharma friend with whom you share pure samaya, someone with whom you have good relations and in whom you trust. Such a Dharma friend can remind you of the practice as you are passing away and can give reliable answers if you have questions. A Dharma friend who has deep understanding himself would be of tremendous benefit. Avoid any ordinary person who is only selfishly interested in your death, who has a grudge against you, or who will only talk about ordinary and deluded topics. Also avoid the presence of people fond of wailing and sobbing as that will dis-

turb your meditation state at the time of leaving this life.

People who are quite stable in their practice do not need this instruction. This advice is meant for those who have only a slight degree of stability. The company and the situation at the moment of death is crucial for practitioners who are unstable and who are still influenced by outer circumstances.

There have been some cases of great practitioners who pondered, "Tomorrow I am going to die, so why not die in some special, unusual way?" For them dying was a kind of game. They would dress up and sit in some funny posture so when their bodies were found they would create a strong reaction in others. Other lamas with high realization when about to die said, "Ha! ha! It is time to die. How should I die? What was so and so's posture when he died? Cross-legged? Okay, then I think I will die lying down this time," and doing so, would simply pass away.

For practitioners who possess the confidence of realization, dying and the bardos are like a game, a form of entertainment. But for those of us whose confidence is not that stable, these same experiences may be dreadful.

Furthermore, it is not always certain that the dissolution stages will happen in sequence. We cannot truly generalize about the manner in which a person will die or the experiences one will undergo. Sometimes the different dissolution stages of the elements occur in completely the opposite order. One aspect may be stronger or it may be very short. The dissolution stages depend upon the individual's physical constitution, the condition of his channels and the circumstances surrounding his death, i.e. whether it is due to illness, evil influences and so on.

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It is good to become familiar with and memorize the different dissolution stages and the outer, inner and secret signs of death, so that when they occur we will know what is happening. We will then be able to focus on what is of real benefit at that time. Although there are different techniques, the greatest benefit comes from simply resting in ordinary mind, in innate wakefulness.

The reason we continue to roam about in samsaric existence is, first of all, because we have not recognized ordinary mind, this unconstructed wakefulness that is already present in us. Also, we have not trained or gained stability in that recognition. The highest value during the different dissolution stages results from realization of ordinary mind. If we can simply rest in the nature of ordinary mind, it will make all the difference. At the time of death we can no longer rely on credit cards, money or friends. We can only rely on ourselves. Again, this self-reliance depends upon our ability to rest in ordinary mind. When the dissolution stages are finished, it is possible that through resting in the state of ordinary mind, one can attain liberation during the event called the meeting of the luminosity of mother and child.

What is the best physical posture to assume while passing away? It is best to sit up in the meditation posture. Next best is to recline in what is called the posture of the sleeping lion; holding the thumb at the base of the ring finger on each hand, and placing the left hand on the left thigh and the right hand under the chin in a particular manner. This has a special effect on the movement of subtle energy currents in the body. This posture also facilitates recog-

nition of the luminosity of the path during the death process and improves meditation at that time.

Usually it is said the person who has trained in the luminosity of the path during his life will be able to recognize the luminosity of the ground at the moment of death. This doesn't mean that there are two different luminosities, one here and one there. But unless one has recognized the luminosity of the path and knows how to experience it during practice, one will have no idea about what the ground luminosity is when it manifests at the end of the dissolution stages. The experienced practitioner recognizes the ground luminosity at that point simply by thinking, "Oh yes, that's it!" and then resting in equanimity. This is called the meeting of mother and child luminosities.

No matter who your teacher was or which practice he did, at the point of death the vital importance lies in feeling complete trust in him and confidence in your own practice. Mahamudra or Dzogchen use different terminologies to describe an identical experience. Innate wisdom can be called ordinary mind or it can be called the view of Trekchö. It is really the same; simply the recognition of the luminosity of the path. If we are able to recognize the luminosity of the path at the moment of dying, then regardless of what appears in the dissolution stages we will be liberated into dharmakaya.

The particular Dharma terminology we use to describe this does not really matter. The key point is our personal and practical understanding of Mahamudra or Dzogchen, our ability to simply relax and rest in the state which is empty yet cognizant — emptiness indivisible from cognizance. When simply resting like that, totally relaxed, free and easy,

whatever occurs during the dissolution stages does not really matter. The experiences just pass by. That is the key point. No technique or further instruction is needed.

If we simply rest in this state of empty cognizance known as the luminosity of the path and are totally relaxed when the ground luminosity manifests, we are naturally liberated. There is no question, no doubt about this. We need not try to apply a special technique or trick. Liberation occurs automatically.

“One should confidently resolve that the gradual manifestations . . . are all nothing but the luminous dharmakaya manifestation of self-cognizance” (p. 36). Earlier, the unity of being cognizant and empty was stressed. Here, in the case of a practitioner of Tögal, we must resolve that whatever manifests, all the different experiences in the dissolution stages, are the display of our mind. Yet, the main practice is simply to rest in the view.

One may have practiced the Six Doctrines of Naropa, the Mahamudra practice of bliss and emptiness, the Sakya system of Path and Result called Lamdrey or the Jordruk system of Kalachakra. Due to one's practical experience based on the channels, essences and energies, one will be able to recognize the subtle aspects of the dissolution stages as they occur.

What are the chief differences between the practices of Trekchö, Tögal and the Six Doctrines? In Trekchö and essence Mahamudra, the main point is to be able to rest in and sustain the continuity of the view. That is sufficient for achieving liberation. When practicing Tögal while maintaining the view of Trekchö, one uses whatever manifests as an adornment in the sense of acknowledging that all the dif-

ferent experiences that take place are actually the display or manifestation of innate wakefulness. One attains liberation through that recognition. According to the Six Doctrines, the key point is to acknowledge that our body, speech and mind are in essence the vajra body, vajra speech and vajra mind. As such they become a support for different yogic techniques and we thereby recognize the pure natural aspects of our body, speech and mind. Through that we are able to realize the view of Mahamudra.

Physical pain may arise during the process of passing away, especially at the moment called the interruption of the life-force. When the skilled practitioner is confronted with intense agony, he merely looks into the essence of the sensation of pain and the pain is no longer an overwhelming problem. The important point for people who are not stable in practice is not to get too carried away, not to put too much importance on the sensation of pain or physical discomfort during this time. Simply relax in the view, right up to the experience that is called the ground luminosity of full attainment.

If you are unable to do that, then visualize your root guru and with intense and deep-felt devotion make the aspiration to recognize the nature of luminosity. By combining the power of devotion with the blessings of an enlightened teacher at this point, it is possible to recognize the luminosity of the path. Therefore, when the ground luminosity dawns, one will be liberated. The crucial point here is one-pointed devotion. Unite your mind with that of your root teacher and develop powerful trust in order to realize the luminosity of the path. If you are unable to engender this confidence, one more chance remains which is the practice called phowa.

Phowa literally means to change place, to move from one place to another. Phowa can be explained under three headings: the type of person who practices it, the time to practice it and how to practice it. Practitioners who have a high degree of stability in Mahamudra, Dzogchen or Madhyamika practice and some realization will have the confidence to be liberated simultaneously with the final exhalation of breath. No subsequent bardos appear for them. They simply rest in dharmadhatu. Such people need not worry about the practice of phowa because they do not conceive of a real entity to be transferred and do not hope for a place to be transferred to. Such practitioners are totally beyond these concepts.

For practitioners of a lesser capacity who lack the confidence of the view of the natural state, there are many instructions on how to practice phowa at the moment of dying. Masters like Nagarjuna in India and Marpa in Tibet acted as if they were practicing phowa at the moment of death in order to show this path to others. For example, *The Mirror of Mindfulness* describes how Marpa died. First he “transformed his consort Dagmema into light and dissolved her into his heart center. Straightening his body he said, ‘Sons, if you do phowa, do it like this!’ Then a sphere of five-colored light the size of an egg ascended into the sky from a crack at the crown of his head” (p. 38). That is how Marpa passed away. Even though it appeared that he died while leaving a physical body, he attained what is called the unified level of a vajra holder.

The great Dzogchen master Melong Dorje also passed away in a special manner. He gathered all of his disciples around him, sang songs and gave his last teaching amid a feast gathering. Then he said, “Now

I will die." He "sent a white light the size of a cooking pot up into the air from the crown of his head. Growing bigger and bigger, it filled the sky with rainbow lights and circles" (p. 38). Although it appeared that both Marpa and Melong Dorje did phowa at the moment of death, there is actually no difference between what they manifested and the attainment of rainbow body. There have been many other such masters in the past.

The success of our practice depends mainly upon our faith and devotion and on maintaining pure samayas. With strong devotion, the practice of phowa is certain to be successful. The one thing that definitely hinders successful phowa is broken samayas.

We should train now, during this lifetime, in the practice of phowa until we develop signs of result. One special sign in particular assures us that at the moment of death we are prepared to perform phowa successfully. However, someone not very proficient in the practice of phowa can do the practice with the help of a lama at the moment of death. With this combined effort it is quite easy to accomplish phowa.

Phowa is defined as the ascent of the mind together with the prana principle. The combination of mind and prana are sent to a good and worthwhile place. Departing from here to the destined place is the practice of phowa.

A correspondence exists between the place of the next rebirth and the aperture in the body through which the consciousness leaves at the moment of death. For example, if the consciousness leaves through the body's lower openings one will be reborn in one of the lower realms as a hell being, hungry ghost or animal. If the consciousness exits through the upper openings, such as the ears, eyes,

nose and so forth, one will be reborn in the higher realms of humans, asuras or gods, yet still within samsara. Therefore, during the practice of phowa, one must first block all the openings in a special way so that only the aperture at the crown of the head remains open. When the mind leaves the body through the crown of the head, one will be reborn in a pure land beyond samsaric existence where the conditions for practice are perfect.

Someone performing phowa on behalf of another person must be absolutely sure that the person is dead. Otherwise a great sin is committed. An advanced practitioner who knows the death signs will check the nadis, the movement of prana and the body heat to see that the person is actually dead and then perform phowa. It should never be done before the person has truly passed away.

Moreover, when doing phowa for oneself one must be sure that one is actually dying, that it is really the end. If the consciousness is shot up out of the body prematurely it may not be able to return. Therefore be absolutely certain that the time of death has really come, that the situation is irreversible. The true measure for ascertaining the time of death is when the experiences of whiteness and redness have occurred. At that time one can safely practice phowa.

There are different methods and levels of phowa. The dharmakaya phowa free from reference point is performed simply by resting in the nature of the view. In other words it is without concepts of a self to be transferred and a place to which one can be transferred. The advanced Dzogchen practitioner simply rests in the view of Trekchö and attains the dharmakaya phowa. For someone with true confi-

dence in Dzogchen or Mahamudra practice, the word phowa, meaning 'transference,' is really no longer applicable.

The second type of phowa, sambhogakaya phowa, is practiced when one has become adept in the development stage of visualizing oneself as a deity. Having perfected this practice, at the time of death one can manifest in the form of the deity and thereby attain the sambhogakaya phowa. In the terminology of the Six Doctrines, this is equivalent to having some degree of stability in the practice called illusory body. At the time of death one simply applies the practice and attains sambhogakaya.

The third kind, nirmanakaya phowa, means actually maintaining the concept of oneself as the traveller en route to a pure abode, an unmistakable pure land. The key point in nirmanakaya phowa is to have complete devotion to one's teacher and compassion for all sentient beings. Then one focuses on the form of a seed syllable that shoots up the central channel. A certain sound accompanies the seed syllable, either HIK or PHAT, depending on which practice one is doing. We need not have great realization or hold a high view to do this practice successfully. We simply need devotion, compassion and the ability to visualize the seed syllable.

There was another phowa tradition which was lost centuries ago. It was literally called 'transference of consciousness,' *drong-jug*, as opposed to 'ejection of consciousness,' phowa. Marpa Lotsawa received this practice in India. He passed it on to his son who died prematurely and was unfortunately unable to transmit the lineage to others.

A fourth kind of phowa is similar to the practice of guru yoga. In this phowa, instead of visualizing a

deity or a buddha like Amitabha, Vajrasattva or Guru Rinpoche, we imagine our root guru at the crown of our head. Apart from this, the details are the same.

The fifth kind, khachö phowa, is performed when one has stability in dream yoga, in conjuring up apparitions during the dream state.

It is not enough to learn phowa practice from a book. We must receive oral instructions from a spiritual teacher and then apply the practice. The first sign of a result in phowa practice is that a strong itch is felt at the top of the head. Later a tiny hole appears into which a straw of grass can actually be inserted. One should continue the practice under competent supervision until this sign manifests.

When we have received the teachings on phowa, trained and attained the signs, then we are somewhat independent. When in addition, we gain some mastery, we can then help others to practice phowa when they are dying. Moreover, we are always prepared to eject our own consciousness at the moment of death.

When the actual time for phowa arrives, we must one-pointedly concentrate on the practice and not be distracted by thoughts of taking care of relatives or making a last attack on our enemies. Focus your attention and be free from doubt. When doing phowa for the final time, eject the consciousness like a competent archer who shoots the arrow from his bow. It flies off beyond return and swiftly reaches the target.

The word phowa is used quite often, but in essence it means to prevent our awareness, which is wisdom inseparable from emptiness, from falling into further confusion. By means of techniques such as visualizing seed syllables, mingling our mind with the

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prana that shoots out and so forth, we dissolve conceptual mind into the sphere of dharmadhatu. The consciousness totally merges with the nature of dharmadhatu.

To sum up, be sure that you do not spend your whole life pursuing the eight worldly concerns. Do not let Dharma practice remain as mere words and theory. When the time to die comes, if you have not already gained the confidence of realization, then you should at least be able to perform the practice of phowa. In that way, your life will not have been wasted.

THE LUMINOUS BARDO OF DHARMATA

The third bardo, the luminous bardo of dharmata, is again described under three headings: definition, experience and how to deal with the experience. When describing the luminous bardo of dharmata quite a few complicated key terms specific to the teachings of Tantra are used, especially from the Mahamudra and Dzogchen systems. The two most important terms are ground of liberation and ground of confusion. The instructions on how to understand these two terms are crucial points, extremely pithy and profound. To understand what these words point to—their vital meaning—we must understand what takes place during the luminous bardo of dharmata.

The luminous bardo of dharmata occurs after the outer elements, the sense faculties and sense bases as well as the inner gross and subtle thoughts have dissolved. It follows the completion of the three experiences of whiteness, redness and blackness at the end of the painful bardo of dying. To reiterate, the white element descends from the crown of one's head and the red element ascends from one's navel. When these two elements meet at the heart center, consciousness and the prana principle melt together,

causing the ordinary person to faint and remain in a state of mindless oblivion.¹

Regardless of whether one has practiced or not or whether one is a human being or an insect, at the moment of the meeting of these two elements the ground luminosity of dharmakaya dawns. The one who recognizes this for what it is, is liberated. The one who falls under the power of ego-clinging and does not recognize this falls unconscious, oblivious. According to the general system of teachings this unconscious state lasts for three and a half days.²

The three experiences of whiteness, redness and blackness are accompanied by the cessations of the three poisons—attachment, anger and delusion. Whiteness is accompanied by the complete cessation of the forty thought states resulting from anger. Redness appears together with the cessation of the thirty-three thought states resulting from attachment.

1. Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche: "Normal people simply fall unconscious. On the other hand, we can never say for sure whether someone remains for a short time in meditation after the outer breath expires. If someone practiced shamatha or dhyana, the after-death meditation state will last for as long as the individual's ability to remain in one-pointed attention. For a person who never practiced meditation there is of course no state of samadhi. A great sinner experiences what is called the 'downward directness;' he goes directly to the hell realms without any bardo."

2. Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche continues, "There are two aspects: primordial purity and spontaneous presence. At first, primordial purity manifests at the end of the bardo of dying. The practitioner who has trained on the path will recognize this and be liberated into dharmakaya. Ordinary people will faint for a period of approximately three days. When awakening the deceased will then experience the unfolding of spontaneous presence with its lights, sounds, light rays and deities in the bardo of dharmata.

"The ground luminosity or the unfolding of primordial purity belongs to the end of the bardo of dying. The practitioner can attain enlightenment in the state of dharmakaya only at that point. Similarly, the practitioner can attain enlightenment in the state of sambhogakaya during the bardo of dharmata and nirmanakaya in the bardo of becoming."

Blackness marks the cessation of the seven thought states resulting from delusion. What remains when all of these thought states have ceased is simply the unconstructed nature of mind called dharmakaya. In Dzogchen terminology, this is called basic wakefulness and is the naked awareness itself. The Mahamudra teachings name this state 'ordinary mind.' The experience happens for everyone, whoever they are; the only difference is the length of time this state last.

Someone who has received the pointing-out instruction from a qualified master and has been able to recognize the nature of mind must at this point sustain the continuity of that state and attain liberation. Anyone else will not recognize this basic state of mind and will return to being obscured by the different aspects of ignorance. Again the effects of past karma will propel one towards a new rebirth.

When the three subtle dissolution stages are taking place, one must be alert because what happens immediately after is the ground luminosity. The general vehicles call this basic state ultimate truth or prajnaparamita, transcendent knowledge. In Buddhism, this is the ultimate 'thatness' to be realized. Different systems of teachings give this ground luminosity different names. According to Madhyamika, it is ultimate truth devoid of constructs, according to Mahamudra, recognition within nonthought and according to Dzogchen, awareness resuming its essence.

Prior to the bardo of dharmata various manifestations appear: mirages, five-colored lights, and experiences similar to sunlight, moonlight, the light of a butter lamp and darkness. When these have ceased, the ground luminosity that is beyond all of these displays dawns like a clear and cloudless sky. This

ground luminosity is referred to as dharmakaya, the mind of the Buddha Samantabhadra, the wisdom beyond intellect or simply basic wakefulness. The practitioner who has received the pointing-out instruction during his lifetime and has recognized what is called the luminosity of the path, will immediately recognize the ground luminosity and thereby attain liberation. This moment is called the meeting of mother and child luminosity.³ In this case, the practitioner's former training makes liberation very easy. That is the whole reason why it is so essential to rest again and again in the natural state of ordinary mind during one's lifetime. By becoming familiar with the ground luminosity now, one can attain liberation into dharmakaya at the moment of death. The whole point of practice is simply to recognize the luminosity of path, the natural state of Mahamudra. This and only this is what is truly effective when we die. Many great scholars who failed to train in this recognition were not liberated at the time of death.

In essence the ground luminosity is empty, but in nature it is said to be luminous, which in this context means cognizant. These two qualities, emptiness and cognizance, are indivisible. During our studies we hear a lot about emptiness, the emptiness of this and the emptiness of that, but the actual, true emptiness is directly and nakedly present in the period immedi-

3. Tulku Ugyen Rinpoche: "The luminosity of ground is the buddha nature, the sugatagarbha. The luminosity of path is the natural face pointed out by your master, the state of rigpa that we can recognize. The luminosity of fruition is stability in rigpa. This can be attained at the time of death after the experiences of appearance, increase and attainment. The experienced practitioner unifies the luminosity of mother and child. This means the ground luminosity that is like a mother and the path luminosity that is like her child meet together and, just like the child jumping up on the mother's lap, we capture the stronghold of rigpa. That is called the luminosity of fruition." (Also see the Foreword by Tulku Ugyen Rinpoche).

ately preceding the luminous bardo of dharmata. For all sentient beings this moment holds the possibility of being either the ground of liberation or the ground of confusion, leading to either enlightenment or further samsaric existence.

There are many reasons why it is beneficial for us to practice the Dharma right now, but the main reason is that it will help us attain liberation during the meeting of mother and child luminosity.

Why is the ground luminosity experienced at this point? It is simply because all sentient beings already possess an enlightened essence, the sugatagarbha. This essence is present and permeates anyone who has mind, just as oil completely permeates any sesame seed. So why don't we recognize the mother luminosity if it is present in ourselves as our true nature? We do not recognize it because our nature is obscured by coemergent ignorance and conceptual ignorance. Obscured by these two types of ignorance, we fail to recognize innate wakefulness, the wisdom inherent within ourselves. We wallow in delusion, mistaking what is impermanent to be permanent and holding that which is untrue to be true. These delusions perpetuate our wandering through the realms of samsaric existence.

However, the end of the dissolution stages of whiteness, redness and blackness is like a momentary lifting of the veil of delusion, leaving all obscurations temporarily yet totally absent. At this time the ground wisdom is vividly present; the natural state of Mahamudra is revealed bare and naked.

Ordinary people do not recognize this experience when it dawns upon them. Instead, old habitual tendencies reappear and carry them away into patterns of conceptual thinking. Thus they return to the state

The Luminous Bardo of Dharmata

of conditioned existence. Nevertheless, practitioners who have received the pointing-out instruction and made it their personal experience during this lifetime will at death, due to the power of that practice, be able to recognize their natural face, the primordial state of ground luminosity, and be liberated. *The Mirror of Mindfulness* describes this recognition: "They meet as old friends, or like a river flowing into the ocean" (p. 47). At that point, all that is left is dharmadhatu — space that is totally free from mental constructs yet naturally endowed with cognizant wakefulness.

The Nyingma system gives this ground luminosity the name Samantabhadra with consort. It is the unity of emptiness and cognizance, the unity of prajna and upaya, and has no concrete existence because in essence it is primordially pure. Nonetheless, at the same time, it is not nonexistent because the five wisdoms as well as numerous other qualities are spontaneously present. Its very nature is spontaneous presence that is "the utterly pure nature of space — dwell as the indivisible great bliss, the essence of primordial purity in the unchanging fourth time of equality" (p. 47).

Although this primordial state appears to everyone, merely having recognized it in glimpses during our lifetime is not enough. We must become familiar with it and grow accustomed to it through training.

Due to our habitual tendencies and ignorance, this state of ground luminosity has not yet been fully acknowledged. However, based on the dissolution stages of appearance, increase and attainment, all our disturbing emotions are for a moment totally cleared away, like a curtain being drawn aside. The sights, sounds, smells, tastes and tactile sensations of the

sense organs, and all dualistic grasping and fixation have disappeared. One arrives at the luminosity of the ground, the mother luminosity; therefore the luminosity of the child, the path luminosity, is able to merge with the mother.

Because fixation on sense objects is absent, our innate wakefulness is able to manifest nakedly. This state of not fixating on anything whatsoever is wakefulness free from arising, dwelling and ceasing; yet, all things can be cognized. It is not a total black-out but an experience of the natural wisdom beyond words, free from subject and object and concepts of this or that. In ordinary experience, the mind always fixates on the attributes of the sense objects that appear through the five senses. But here, since that kind of dualistic experience is absent, our innate wakefulness is experienced directly. Within the state of having recognized our nature, we reach enlightenment, described as self-occurring self-liberation. We realize that the source of whatever arises is the expanse of primordial purity.

If we fail to recognize the ground luminosity we again commence the creation of karma through dualistic fixation. But if we have been introduced to the ground luminosity through the pointing-out instruction and have trained in the child luminosity of the path, we can be liberated. We can dissolve into the expanse of spontaneous presence. All hope and fear, all accepting and rejecting and all dualistic fixation has been destroyed. Simply by recognizing this ground luminosity, we are liberated and do not have to undergo any further bardos.

A distinction should be made here between the dharmakaya luminosity just explained and the sambhogakaya luminosity. If we do not recognize

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dharmakaya or ground luminosity at the close of the bardo of dying, the luminous bardo of dharmata offers us a second chance to attain liberation through the appearance of sambhogakaya luminosity.

Having entered the bardo of dharmata, unusual manifestations occur that are the displays of the body, speech, and mind aspects of our own buddha-nature: peaceful and wrathful deities appear, strange sounds are heard and different manifestations of mind are experienced. If we have gained stability in practice and have recognized emptiness, or if we have some strength in shamatha, or a degree of stability in the development stage so that we can visualize ourselves as a deity, then these appearances, the displays of dharmata, hold the possibility for attaining liberation.

Now the following question might arise: "What about people who have never seen any pictures of peaceful and wrathful deities and who have never visualized them? Do they also experience these deities in the bardo?" We cannot really say what non-practitioners experience at this point, but they certainly experience very colorful and intense forms that can be as big as Mount Sumeru, the enormous mythical mountain, or as minute as a sesame seed. Images are extremely brilliant and colors are overwhelmingly clear. Incredibly loud noises resound like one hundred thousand simultaneous thunderclaps. The light can be so bright that we feel like we are being completely perforated by light rays. If someone has practiced there is a great chance of success, but someone who has absolutely no experience of Dharma practice might faint from sheer fright.

Many peaceful and wrathful appearances manifest. One might experience pure realms with divinities, not just small realms but the whole expanse of

space filled with these manifold appearances. Why do manifestations such as the peaceful and wrathful deities and the sounds, colors and lights appear? They appear because all sentient beings possess the buddha nature. Based on that, what we at present perceive as the five aggregates, the five elements, our consciousness and the sense objects are in their pure aspects the display of this buddha nature, our innate wakefulness. They are already the pure mandala of deities. At the end of the dissolution stages, this manifestation of innate wakefulness simply appears in its pure form.

All sentient beings are buddhas, but this fact is veiled by our temporary obscurations. When these veils are removed, we are actual buddhas. When a gap occurs in our dualistic fixation during the process of death, then all these different manifestations of our buddha nature are experienced unveiled. Based on our stability or lack of stability in practice, that period might last for days or it might just flicker by. For someone who has no familiarity with spiritual practice this experience is very short and the tendency for confusion and ego-clinging, holding onto duality, will quickly cloud awareness, covering up these manifestations. Then the bardo of becoming begins.

The natural manifestations of dharmata, the pure aspects of the five aggregates and the five elements, are the five male and female buddhas, the male and female bodhisattvas, and so forth. In their totality, these are known as the one hundred peaceful and wrathful deities. Generally, it is said that these one hundred peaceful and wrathful deities appear, but actually this depends very much upon the individual and his tendencies, as well as the kind of practice

The Luminous Bardo of Dharmata

with which he is familiar. In short, what appears corresponds to the method used to purify oneself, and that which one has focused on as the object to be purified (i.e. one's yidam practice and what it is aimed at purifying).

In essence, our buddha nature is empty; in nature, it is cognizant; and, in manifestation or function, it is unobstructed. As a normal person, it is hidden by temporary obscurations. The moment our ego-clinging falls apart, then our innate wisdom, the luminosity of dharmata, will vividly, nakedly appear. This ground luminosity is not just empty; it is also luminous, aware. This aspect of luminosity and awareness can manifest in myriad ways. All the various manifestations appearing in the bardo of dharmata come from that. According to an individual's karmic tendencies, these manifestations may appear as terrifying. One may feel threatened and think, "They have come to take me away!" or "They are attacking me!" It all seems very real.

In short, the dead person experiences many pure and impure visions, vivid and brilliant, like a huge brocade suddenly unfurled in the sky. At this time we acquire special qualities we never had during our lifetime, such as clairvoyance, perfect recall of the past, and other miraculous abilities. These are variously known as the five superknowledges, the six recollections, perfect recall, and continuous samadhi. Nevertheless, the bottom line here is whether or not we have trained during this lifetime. If we have and can recall the practice, liberation is possible. If not, we continue on to what is called the bardo of becoming as it dawns in our experience, flashing forth like in a dream.

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We have already covered the first three bardos: the bardo of this life, the bardo of dying, and the bardo of dharmata. Now we will examine further the third heading in these categories—how to apply the instructions. The appearance of the ground luminosity of dharmakaya at the end of the bardo of dying and the appearance of the sambhogakaya luminosity in the bardo of dharmata both provide unique opportunities for the practitioner to attain liberation from samsaric existence. This point is crucial and should be closely examined.

Many things happen during the bardos of dying and dharmata, but for most people these bardos do not last long, not more than several moments. These moments are called ‘moments of completed action,’ the duration of which depends on whether the individual is a practitioner or not. For most non-practitioners it passes quickly, flickering by like a few snaps of the fingers. For practitioners it depends on one’s physical constitution, how the subtle channels of one’s body are structured, and also on the degree of stability in practice that one has attained. Among people with some stability, the unfolding of primordial purity at the end of the bardo of dying can last as long as it takes to eat a meal. In this case, the measurement of time is called a ‘meditation day.’

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This 'day' is defined as the length of time one can sustain the natural state, the continuity of recognizing innate wakefulness, the nature of mind. A practitioner who possesses confidence in liberation can rest for as long as he desires in that state.

What does it mean to possess confidence in liberation? First, it is not enough to have merely recognized the nature of our mind; we must also have resolved this recognition beyond all doubts. But even that is not sufficient. We must acquire complete confidence in the liberation of thoughts, like the confidence that one can swim to the other side of a river. A practitioner with this kind of confidence will be able to rest in the ground luminosity at death for as long as he or she wishes. There are many instances of people whose bodies did not decompose for several days after passing away; during that time there was still slight warmth at the heart center. This happens in two cases. One case is that of someone who has recognized the view of the luminosity of path, the unconditioned nature, and simply rests in the realization of this nature. Another case of the body remaining without decomposing is that of someone who has attained stability in a certain type of mental concentration called supramundane shamatha.

There are two types of shamatha, mundane and supramundane. When an individual has reached a certain level of stability in supramundane shamatha, it is possible for the dead body to remain without decomposing for as long as several years. In Burma and Thailand, there are several practitioners whose bodies have not yet decomposed and who are still in that state. This has also happened in Tibet. Shamatha means abiding calmly: when this practice is perfected one overcomes negative emotions and thought activ-

ity. Like water that is undisturbed by the wind, one simply rests in a concentrated state without objective support, remaining totally undisturbed. For this reason one can remain for a very long time. Actually, it is quite a good state and is a sign that one has some degree of mastery over one's mind. This enables the mind, indivisible from prana, to abide in the body without the body decomposing for as long as one wishes. At the end of that time, the consciousness does not leave the body through the inferior openings, such as the eyes, ears and so forth; it exits through the crown of the head.

I shall now describe how death occurs for someone who has gained stability in the path luminosity during the bardo of this life. At present the mind within the physical body is like space within a jar: inner space is still separated from the space outside. The moment the jar breaks, the space within and without merge and are indivisible. Likewise, at the time of death, the moment the physical body disintegrates, the advanced practitioner's consciousness merges with the primordially pure nature, the ground luminosity. At this point a sign that such a person has been liberated can be seen by others. A drop of red and white liquid, called the bodhichitta essence, is exuded from the left nostril or from the crown of the head. Why is that? Within the physical body there are certain energy currents called pranas: the wisdom pranas in the left side of the body, the karmic pranas in the right side of the body. Therefore, it is a very good sign after someone has passed away if the bodhichitta essence issues from the left nostril.

The consciousness may remain in the body while the practitioner is resting in the meditation state after

death. A visible sign of resting in the meditation state is that the flesh remains supple and radiant. It seems almost impossible to ascertain whether or not the person has died. In this case the eyes have a loving, compassionate expression; warmth remains at the heart center and the body appears very fresh and glowing. On the other hand, if the consciousness remains due to strong attachment or resentment, the heart center might still be warm but the body will be as stiff as any other corpse, with the face contorted in an unpleasant expression. These different situations are both mentioned because instructions are meant to clear away doubt; otherwise one may conclude that whenever some heat remains at the heart after death, the person is resting in the state of meditation. This is not necessarily true.

Generally, most people consider the dividing line between life and death to be whether or not the body is still breathing. But, actually, if we examine these two situations mentioned, the mind is still in the body even though external breathing has stopped. The only sure sign of whether the mind has actually departed from the body is if the red and white essences have appeared at the bodily apertures, either at the lower openings or at the upper openings such as the nostrils or the crown of the head.¹ Ac-

1. Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche: "The moment the white and red elements converge at the heart center essential liquid slips out. This is accompanied by an intense feeling of fear, so strong that tears involuntarily flow forth from one's eyes and one falls unconscious. Normal people don't recognize the ground luminosity of full attainment which occurs at this point. The moment the essences fall, they faint. That is the very point at which the inner breath ceases, instantaneously and totally.

"When the consciousness does not faint but remains within the state of the ground luminosity of full attainment, that means that rigpa has been recognized. As the sign of that, when this state of samadhi is relinquished a drop of bodhichitta nectar appears from the nostrils.

According to Buddhist tradition, if that has not happened then it is improper to cremate or bury the body. For the practitioner who is quite stable in practice, it does not matter what is done with his body. It can be chopped up or burned immediately. But for a beginner or for one with only some degree of stability in practice, the body should be left completely at peace for as long as the mind remains in the body, usually three and a half days. There should be no shouting or talking. One should not even burn incense.

Although I have told this story in the past it deserves to be told once again. Around 1986 Lama Lobsang Tenpa, a Nepali practitioner, died. He was from northern Nepal but when he was young he went to Tibet and received many teachings. Though not completely realized, he was a good practitioner and definitely not a beginner. He had fallen ill and knew that he was going to die. He had already resigned himself to this fact, but his benefactors, some businessmen in Kathmandu, said, "We have to do whatever we can," so they flew him to Delhi and put him in a hospital. The doctors tried open-heart surgery, but because of a serious malfunction in his heart, it could not be repaired and he died on the operating table. The sponsors and his disciples were outside in the waiting hall. What happened after he died was that the body started to sit up by itself in the meditation posture. The doctors put it back horizontally but again it sat upright. Unused to seeing

We cannot claim that normal people do not shed the drop of bodhi-chitta, because what appears is simply the white and red elements from one's father and mother. But, in the case of normal people, these drops appear right away. If someone remains in the 'after-death meditation state' then the white and red bodhichitta drops appear as the sign that this state is over."

such an event, they strapped him down, but still the body tried to sit up. Startled by this behavior, the doctors took his body into the cremation chamber where it was immediately burned. When the disciples finally knocked on the door and asked, "What happened to our teacher?" the doctors said, "Something really bad happened! We had to burn him immediately. Here are the ashes!" and they handed over a vase. This ignorant action on their part was probably a slight obstacle to Lobsang Tenpa's realization. The mind is something quite amazing and this is a strange story.

Back to the main questions: "How do we recognize the ground luminosity, our buddha nature, during the bardo of dying? What does this recognition depend on?" It depends on one thing alone: our present practice. Without practicing now, it is extremely unlikely that we would recognize the ground luminosity during the bardo of dying.

During the bardo of dying, the dissolution stages of appearance, increase and attainment occur. At their conclusion, if one fails to recognize the dharmakaya luminosity one may black out. When one suddenly awakens, it is to the sambhogakaya luminosity of the bardo of dharmata. This state is extremely clear, brilliant, open and empty. The adept practitioner feels free and blissful. However, someone not familiar with this state through recognizing the path luminosity during this lifetime will find the luminosity of the bardo of dharmata painful and frightening. One will panic and after just a few seconds the tendency towards ego-clinging will reassert itself. One thinks, "What happened! What is this! Where am I?" This ego-clinging, this desire to anchor the identity of 'I' and 'that' in dualistic experi-

ence is the very basis for our experience of a solid reality. Grasping at a self-entity is the direct cause for the vicious circle of samsaric existence to evolve once again.

During the bardo of dharmata a clear and open state happens by itself, unlike our daily life when usually we must push ourselves a little to be mindful of the meditation state. The naked meditation state arises naturally and effortlessly because the dharmata, our innate nature, is unconditioned; it is not produced or fabricated by our meditation practice and so this state is extremely simple. The experienced practitioner can simply relax into this state with full confidence, knowing, "This is what I am used to practicing. Now, without having to create anything, it occurs by itself." With this kind of confidence gained from everyday practice, attaining stability and liberation are easy. At this point of the bardo of dharmata, the practice is beyond effort and we realize a free, comfortable state of mind.

Why are such words as luminosity, suchness, naturalness, unfabricated state, or innate nature used? Because these words describe how our buddha-nature is when left alone. The key point is to grow accustomed to the state of luminosity right now. Almost half of our life may be over, and, assuming that we still have half left, we should try to use the rest of our life to become genuinely acquainted with this state of innate luminosity. Then, liberation will occur at death, and we need not undergo any of the following bardos or take another rebirth. The compassionate, skillful Buddha gave many extensive and profound teachings, but they can be condensed into a single sentence: "Train right now in the path lumi-

nosity so that at the moment of dying you can dissolve confusion into the ground luminosity.”

Once we become interested in gaining personal experience of the Dharma, we must try to apply a teacher’s instruction on meditation practice. There are many different techniques: some suggest concentrating on a mental object, some advise simply resting without a focal point; some techniques utilize certain concepts, some are nonconceptual; some practices are very simple, some are elaborate. Nonetheless, understand that basically there are two states of mind. I will use the Tibetan words for them so that we can remember them later on. One state is called *sem* and the other *rigpa*. *Sem* refers to the state of conceptual thinking, involving fixation on some ‘thing.’ It is a mistaken way of perceiving. *Rigpa* means free from fixation. It refers to a state of natural wakefulness that is without dualistic thinking. It is extremely important to be clear right now about the difference between these two states of mind. Through studying the teachings, receiving oral instructions and clearing away doubts, we can recognize the genuine, authentic way of spiritual practice. When our practice is genuine, the time spent in *rigpa* may be very short, but repeating that authentic state many times is extremely effective at quickly clearing away confusion and disturbing emotions. We rapidly realize what should be realized and develop the enlightened qualities. On the other hand, without knowing genuine *rigpa*, to practice a state of mind that is undecided about what is *rigpa* and what is *sem*, does not hit the vital point, and progress is much slower. Above all, we must distinguish between *sem* and *rigpa*.

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The teachings of the Buddha describe reality in two ways: the seeming and the real, the superficial and the absolute, the relative and the ultimate, how things appear and how things truly are. Whatever is experienced in the state of *sem* or conceptual mind is always just the superficial, the seeming; relative truth or things as they appear. But, whatever is experienced in the state of *rigpa*, nonconceptual wakefulness, is always the genuine, the real; things as they are. What the Buddha calls the path luminosity is simply the nature of things. It is not discovered simply by adopting a set of philosophical ideas, be they Buddhist or whatever. Moreover, path luminosity is not something one discovers through clever thinking, by trying to figure out a reasonable version of reality. Neither is it some new state that the Buddha invented. It is just the nature of things as they are.

In the past, a man dressed in yellow robes called Buddha Shakyamuni spoke. His teachings were collected and were later given the label Buddhism. But actually, he simply pointed out the nature of things, the innate wakefulness that is primordially present in us and which did not suddenly appear at the time of the Buddha. This true state of innate wakefulness, the ultimate nature called ordinary mind is the ground luminosity. This is something that we all experience briefly from time to time, but in reality we are never separate from it. Innate wakefulness is not something that only the buddhas experience in some extraordinary place far away. We also experience it, but we fail to acknowledge it. Because of not recognizing the ground luminosity, we do not train ourselves in it. Even if we have recognized this innate wakefulness, because of instability in the recognition, we always lose track of it and continue in *samsaric*

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existence. On the other hand, 'buddha' means someone who recognized innate wakefulness or ground luminosity, trained in it as path and attained stability in that recognition. He discarded all falsehood, attained liberation, and actualized all the enlightened qualities. That is the meaning of buddhahood.

The different levels of Buddhist teaching contained in the nine vehicles use different terminology to describe this natural state of being. The terminology depends on how direct the teachings are, but what they all actually point to is the same; it is simply the path luminosity.

How should we personally practice the path luminosity? We must depend on some technique, some method. First, we see a teacher and ask him what to do. He says, "Meditate," and we think, "All right, I will practice meditation." Then what happens? What is meditation? Usually, we think it means sitting with something held in mind, either a concrete object or something abstract. We think that by keeping that mental focal point we are practicing meditation. But the actual state of path luminosity is not a meditation on some 'thing;' neither is it a state of distraction, following old thought patterns. Luminosity refers to what is actual; simply that which is naturally present. We use the term path luminosity when talking about it, but training in it means simply maintaining a continuity of wakefulness without words, without meditating on a particular object. As long as we think there is some object upon which we should fix our mind, innate wakefulness eludes us. Regardless of whether we are keeping an abstract or a concrete thing in mind, it misses the point, obscuring the path luminosity.

Upon hearing this, we might frown upon the practice of meditating on conditioned phenomena, regarding it as not very advanced. We think, "Now, I will go a step further and meditate on that which is unconditioned. I will keep nothing in mind!", but we retain a conceptual reference point in that we fixate on something unconditioned. This is still conditioned in the sense that some dualistic setup lingers in our mind. It is not the real meditation practice of path luminosity.

Another thing that can happen is that we want to gain a thorough comprehension of the philosophy of Buddhism. We hear the teachings, "All phenomena are empty. The ego is devoid of true existence," and we start to think about that — "Oh, what I usually believe to be the real world, what I experience through my five senses as the sights, sounds, smells, tastes and tangible things, when examined closely possess no true independent existence. Although I experience them while they appear, they are actually empty of any self-entity." At some point we feel understanding this theory of emptiness is not difficult. Moreover, that which discriminates, thinking "this is right, this is wrong," the 'me' who is trying to find itself or track down the ego, is also not a tangible thing that can be pinpointed. The self only *seems* to exist. It appears as though there is a self, but at the same time this so-called 'I' is actually impossible to find. Now we got the idea that there is also no real ego. That is all right in itself. We have a theoretical understanding of emptiness, but we might mistake it for genuine realization when it is nothing more than theory, just the thought of emptiness. We practice this idea in our meditation, solidifying the theories, and nothing much happens. Years can go by. We

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find it very hard to progress beyond this theoretical understanding and become depressed. We think "I did all this practice and nothing has happened. I am useless!" Or we get angry and resent our teacher, thinking, "He did not give me the right teachings. He fooled me! I wasted my time!" This is quite a serious problem, quite a big obstacle. In fact, it is the biggest mistake we could make. That is why I place so much emphasis on the fact that it is extremely important right now to gain some personal certainty, some practical confidence in the view, in wakefulness free from mental constructs. This is what really counts. Yet, it may take some preparation.

Often the teachings make use of difficult terminology such as dharmakaya or the luminosity of dharmata to refer to the ultimate view. But actually, the real meaning is our present state of mind when it is not distracted for even a second and at the same time not meditating upon anything. At this point nondistraction means not slipping away or straying from the continuity of our innate nature. It means nothing other than this. We can use the word meditation, but as long as an object is held in mind, whether it is sublime or ordinary, there is always dualistic fixation. The phrase 'luminosity of dharmata' means that dharmata, our innate nature, while empty, is at the same time naturally cognizant. It is like space. Space is empty, but we can still talk about space. Space simply is. When we talk about the elements earth, water, fire and wind, they are easy to understand because we can actually see and take hold of them, even measure them. There is no question about the presence of the first four elements. We also must say that the element space exists. But while space does not actually exist concretely, it still func-

tions. Space accommodates. In the same way, the luminosity of dharmata is extremely basic.

Dharmata literally means 'nature,' that which is not manufactured, that which is simply natural. It is not produced by a creator; it is uncompounded; it is empty. But at the same time, just as space, though empty, can accommodate things, dharmata, though empty, accommodates the arising or manifestation of all things. Unlike space, dharmata has many other qualities.

In order to take full advantage of the bardo of dharmata, we must recognize the correct view right now. Next, we must know how to sustain the continuity of that view; in other words, how not to spoil it. Whenever we try to remain mindful of it as a thing or to meditate upon it as an object of mental focus, it is spoiled.

Among all the 84,000 different teachings given by the Buddha—the extensive Sutra, the profound Tantra, and the essential oral instructions—among all the different categories, such as Dzogchen or Mahamudra, the key point is, in essence, identical with what is experienced at the moment the luminous bardo of dharmata dawns.

Because the three kayas are automatically present in the luminous bardo of dharmata, it is the state of Mahamudra. Do not think of the three kayas as physical deities with various colors and attributes. The three kayas are simply words used to describe different aspects or facets of the naked state of this luminous bardo of dharmata. It is taught that dharmakaya is empty in essence and the sambhogakaya quality is naturally luminous or cognizant, while the nirmanakaya aspect is the unity of these two, emptiness and cognizance. Because this state is

free from any mental effort of fixating upon a certain object or idea, we can call it prajnaparamita, transcendent knowledge. Before, while involved in conceptual thinking, one never truly realized what prajnaparamita was.

Madhyamika, the Middle Way, is defined as the absence of extremes. A good khenpo who knows not only the words of the scriptures but also has some experience in practice can explain the Madhyamika view as being in perfect harmony with all of the other teachings. This is difficult for someone who has only studied scriptures but lacks practical experience. Statements made from different perspectives often seem to contradict each other. In Tibet, there were many arguments between two schools called Rangtong and Shentong. A teacher who has the confidence of the view, meaning direct experience, is able to establish the Rangtong view very precisely and without any conflict. It will make perfect sense. Furthermore, such a teacher is also able to establish the Shentong view without stating any contradictions. It too will make perfect sense. But when a scholar bases his exposition only on the scriptures and mere theoretical understanding, and says, "Everything, all phenomena from the aggregate of form to the state of omniscient enlightenment, is totally empty, like space," it sounds a little too nihilistic. It sounds as though no matter how much one practices, the results will be empty. What is the point then? One can become discouraged. Alternately, when an inexperienced teacher expounds the Shentong view that the kayas and wisdoms are truly self-existing and that the state of enlightenment is changeless and eternal, it sounds a little too eternalistic, as though it is a non-Buddhist view. That can also be confusing. There-

fore, the main point in practice is to arrive at the view free from mental constructs. To think that things are nonexistent is just a type of mental construct; and to hold the other extreme that something ultimately exists is also a type of mental construct. The real view is free from holding onto any such ideas. That is why it is said that the true view of Madhyamika is free from the confines of mental constructs.

Other practice traditions in Tibet arrive at the same end. The main practice of the Sakya lineage is the Lamdrey system. Lamdrey means path and result. Path refers to the teachings that are applied during practice; by combining these with the view of the result one takes the end result as the path right from the very beginning. How does one do this? Ground luminosity, the unconditioned nature, is possible to realize directly, right now. It must be mingled with our experience along the path. Since in essence ground luminosity and path luminosity are identical, we realize the ultimate result during the bardo of dharmata by growing used to the path luminosity right now.

Why are there so many different teachings; why not just one? What is the use of having all these different names and different approaches? People have diverse interests. We have different ideas about how to drink a cup of tea. Some people must have a spoonful of sugar or their tea is undrinkable, while other people only drink tea without sugar. Everyone has their own idea about how a meal should be, whether it should have a lot of salt, no salt or just a little bit. Some like Nepali food, some like only Western food, or especially French food, even though food is basically the same — it goes in the mouth and

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comes out the other end and it keeps us alive. Still, according to our habits and inclinations we maintain different ideas about how food should be prepared and how it should be eaten. The same principle holds true for the Buddhist teachings; they are easily adapted to suit the varying dispositions of different people. That is why Buddhism has different lineages and different approaches.

The Buddha very kindly gave many different teachings and methods of practicing, but all these different systems converge at one point: right now, while you are alive, get used to the nonconceptual wakefulness called luminous dharmata, the state free from concepts, beyond a meditation of mental fabrication. This is what it all comes down to. Accustom yourself to nonconceptual wakefulness now so at the time of death you will not have to go through the remaining bardos to a new rebirth. Resting in nonconceptual wakefulness is enough to cover all aspects of practice. We call this by so many different names, but once we realize it, buddhahood will no longer be a mere concept, it is a direct experience. The highest yoga is to be attained right now. Rest in nonconceptual wakefulness and you are a genuine yogi—a truly qualified practitioner.

Sadly, when information is given directly to some people, no matter how clearly it is explained, if the listener does not have the karmic aptitude for the teaching it doesn't really penetrate. The numerous teachings given by the Buddha describe how all phenomena included in samsara, nirvana and the path appear. There is their 'seeming mode,' the relative truth, and their 'actual nature,' the ultimate truth. What occurs during the bardo of dharmata is the ultimate nature of things. Dharmata means true na-

ture, a wakefulness beyond concepts, free from acceptance or rejection or artificial constructions. To ensure liberation at that point we must train right now in nonconceptual wakefulness.

The Dzogchen teachings contain certain practices that relate directly to the experiences that arise during the bardo of dharmata. The Mahamudra system includes teachings called the Six Doctrines of Naropa, with practices such as illusory body, dream yoga and bardo practice. If we train in these and combine them with the meditation practice during the waking state, called the bardo of meditation, and the sleeping practice, called the bardo of dream, we can recognize the luminosity of deep sleep. By that we will be able to recognize luminosity and attain liberation during the bardo of dharmata. A practitioner of the path of means, the Six Doctrines, should after recognizing the different signs of apparent luminosity such as the mirage, the whiteness and so forth, simply rest in self-cognizance, nonconceptual wakefulness or ordinary mind, and realize that all these appearances are manifestations of dharmakaya. For someone who has mainly practiced Dzogchen's Tögal it is essential to trust that all the various experiences, the sounds, colors, and lights, the peaceful and wrathful deities and so forth, are all the natural manifestation of one's own nature. Having attained that confidence, liberation is assured.

The vital issue here is to recognize the correct view, whether it is Dzogchen, Madhyamika or Mahamudra. First, recognize the view. Then, in order to enhance your experience of the view and attain stability, utilize a practice such as yidam deity, the Six Doctrines, Tögal and so forth. The Dzogchen system recommends Tögal practice, in which our realization

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of the view progresses by means of various manifestations and experiences. In the same way, whatever occurs in the bardos, all the apparent experiences, displays and manifestations, will further enhance our realization. Whatever arises actually becomes a display or adornment of our innate wakefulness, and in no way becomes an obstacle.

Tsele Rinpoche mentions Garab Dorje's *Three Words Striking the Vital Point*. These three sentences condense all the teachings of the Buddha to the quintessential meaning: recognize your essence, decide on one point and gain confidence in liberation. First, recognize your essence. That is the primary root, the starting point. Without having first recognized your essence, you cannot decide or resolve on it without a doubt. If one is unable to decide upon that as the ultimate, one can never gain confidence in liberation.

The first thing to concentrate on, to really focus all our actions of body, speech and mind on, is recognizing the essence of our mind. That is the starting point. The sentence 'Recognize the essence of your own mind' is an extremely important point. It simply means recognizing that what you already have, your innate, nonconceptual wakefulness, is already a part of yourself and is not something new. The word 'recognize' literally means to arrive at some understanding that we did not have earlier. Do not mistake it to mean discovering something that you did not already possess.

Up until now we have studied and learned and our understanding may have remained an idea, a separate object held in mind. But the natural state of dharmata, the luminosity of wisdom as it is, is not a physical object composed of matter nor a shape with

a certain color that we can see. It is not like that at all. Moreover, it is not as though we, as one entity, are supposed to look at the essence of our mind as another entity. We do not recognize our essence through the dualistic act of one thing looking at another. Recognizing the basic state is not like that.

What is really meant here? Innate wakefulness, the luminosity of dharmata, is the very essence of the mind that fixates or thinks of something. Yet our dualistic fixation and thinking is like a veil that covers and obscures this luminosity.

In short, what is recognized is not a 'thing.' Then what do we recognize? We must experience naked wakefulness directly, and this occurs the instant that our mind is stripped bare of conceptual thinking. That experience, therefore, is not a product of our fabrication. It simply is. The problem is that it is too near to us just like something held so close to our eyes that it is difficult to see. Moreover, it is too easy. We like something more difficult. Simply remaining free from concepts is extremely easy. The only difficulty is it goes against our tendencies—we enjoy conceptual activity, we like to have something to take hold of. So, although it is easy to remain freely, our habitual tendencies pull us away from that state.

The Buddhist teachings are structured according to levels, one above the other, and people with sharp minds will compare the lower teachings to the higher and find that the lower philosophical schools have some defect, some shortcoming. Yet all philosophical ideas are established intellectually, through concepts. As opposed to intellectual reasoning or conceptual insight, the view of Trekchö is nonfabrication, non-meditation and nondistractedness. It is beyond theoretical philosophies.

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The Buddha said, "I have taught you the path to liberation, but know that liberation depends on yourself." The Buddha described how to realize the ultimate truth, but he could not make us realize it—we have to do this ourselves. We are like a person with a cataract; people may show us an apple and say, "Look at this. See how clear it is!", but unless the cataract is removed, we cannot see clearly. Likewise, in order to directly perceive and sustain the natural state, the ultimate nature of things, the obscurations of dualistic knowledge and habitual tendencies must be removed. The most efficient way of quickly removing these subtle obscurations is, after having been introduced to innate wakefulness by a qualified master, to simply rest in the continuity of the natural state. However, unless our obscurations have already thinned out to a certain degree and become very shallow, it is impossible to simply cut through them. That is why all the teachings with a conceptual reference have been given—to reduce our obscurations. We must therefore gather the accumulations of merit and do purification practice. That is the whole point of all the teachings, to advance step by step until it is possible to cut through even subtle obscurations.

All things arise due to causes and circumstances coming together. For example, being born with a beautiful appearance is not necessarily due to one's mother and father being beautiful, since beautiful parents can also have ugly children. A few other causes are necessary. Beauty mainly results from having done something by way of one's body, speech or mind that benefited the physical body of other sentient beings at some point in the past. We can right now directly establish how our mental attitude affects things, without getting into long explanations.

A calm, gentle and disciplined person is more capable of doing things in a proper, agreeable way than someone whose mind is disturbed by aggression or a sense of competitiveness. When a disturbed person does physical work, the outcome is somehow distorted. Our actions create habitual tendencies that then reoccur within our mind. Conversely, when we realize the nature as it is, the three poisons and the various negative thought patterns begin to disappear and the obscurations start to diminish. Once the obscurations diminish, realization of the view is easy. Therefore, the whole basis of Dharma practice is very direct and related to our present state of mind. Practice is not based on old stories and romantic narrations from the past.

When an architect, doctor or artist becomes very agitated by negative emotions due to, say, a problem with his mate or money, he cannot possibly do his job properly. It even is difficult for a doctor to take the pulse of a patient. For an artist, it is difficult to draw a straight line. Why is that? It is because his mind is disturbed. If one is on the verge of a nervous breakdown, deeply depressed or worried, one cannot do anything in the usual way.

When some people get really angry, they cease to see clearly. Even the ordinary perceptions of the five senses are obscured; they are certainly unable to recognize the innate wisdom. On the other hand, when our mind is relaxed and we feel free and easy, everything is beautiful. This whole world is nice and pleasant. Flowers look pretty, it is feels good to be with friends and food tastes delicious. But when our mind is agitated and disturbed, everything feels wrong. Our best friend is annoying, beautiful things look ugly, and we have no appetite. If sitting, we

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want to be somewhere else. When going somewhere else, we want to sit down quietly. At night we cannot sleep. At that point, we are actually a little crazy. This is a mild form of insanity. What is making us crazy? It is the manifestations of our own disturbing emotions, karma and obscurations. Wouldn't it be better to just rest in the natural state in which emptiness and cognizance are a unity?

We must decide on one point. The natural state is totally free from any mental constructs, whether good or bad, special or ordinary; it is perfectly empty. Although empty, it is not blank. It is naturally cognizant, aware. This state of emptiness and awareness as unity is the natural state of the ground luminosity. It is called luminosity of dharmata in this context and is what is shown by a qualified master during the pointing-out instruction. He says, "That's it!" and we may recognize it. But simply having recognized it is not sufficient. We must be totally free from doubt about it. That is what is meant by 'deciding on one point.' Having resolved your experience to be the innate wakefulness beyond a shadow of doubt, train then to gain confidence in liberation. Once you possess the confidence of the view then no matter what scholars or other people say, even if the buddhas and bodhisattvas appear and say, "You are wrong, you are confused, you are still mistaken," because you already experience the natural state of things, the ultimate truth right at that moment, there will be no basis for bewilderment. You have gained total confidence.

Based on our confidence in liberation, we progress towards true realization. Passing away is then like a vase breaking: the space within and the space without mingle together without the slightest

division. It is like the birth of a baby snow lion who immediately has the strength to walk and jump. Or like a baby garuda bird; the moment it hatches from the egg it is able to fly. Likewise, for the practitioner who has confidence in the view, death and liberation are simultaneous. Our experience of the path luminosity during this life and the experience of ground luminosity that happens at the moment of death mingle and blend into one experience. They are not two different luminosities, but just one that is inseparably mingled with dharmakaya.

We may be the type of person who need not depend on elaborate practices in order to stabilize rigpa, nonconceptual wakefulness. On the other hand, we may really need to make use of other practices to stabilize our understanding. If stabilizing rigpa were easy for everybody and they only had to do that and nothing else, then there would not have been much point in Marpa making Milarepa go through all the various trials and tribulations that he underwent. The key point here is that if one can recognize rigpa directly, it is fine. But if this is difficult, then engage in the practices to gather accumulations and purify the obscurations in order to facilitate recognition of your buddha nature.

“Like the confusion in the dreams of one’s sleep last night/ Later on it will be difficult to practice in the bardo” (p. 63). We may have recognized the nature of mind when it was pointed out, but if we just leave it with that and think, “Last year I received the pointing-out instruction, the transmission of mind nature. That is enough. I’ve got it now”, it is actually not enough. Why? Even though we may have recognized mind essence, aren’t we still completely deluded at night while sleeping? When pleasant and

unpleasant events occur in dreams, we either accept or reject, feel happy or afraid and so forth; in other words we are totally deluded. If that is the case right now, what will happen when we arrive at the bardo of dharmata? As in our present dream state, we will not even remember the teachings, let alone remember to recognize mind essence. So there is not much chance for an unskilled practitioner to attain liberation during the bardo of dharmata. It is not enough merely to recognize mind essence once or twice; we need to train in it again and again and become so thoroughly acquainted with it that we do not fall into confusion when meeting different kinds of experiences, even in the dream state.

Tsele Natsok Rangdröl states: "Passing one's days and nights in confusion and tenaciously clinging to a solid reality now, while one's body, speech, and mind are together and one has some freedom, will disappoint one's hopes of being able to rest in meditation during the intense pain at the moment of death, or when fears and delusions are swirling like a tornado in the bardo of dharmata. I think therefore that one must prepare oneself for the great and permanent goal" (p. 63).

At present, our days and nights are for the most part spent holding onto a sense of solid reality. We think that things are permanent when they are not; that conditioned existence is happiness when it is not; that impure phenomena are pure when they are not; that there is a true ego when actually there is not. Deluded by fixation on a solid reality, we spend our whole life on pointless pursuits, thinking that an instant of recognition is sufficient and that later on we will definitely recognize and become liberated in the bardo of dharmata. This is extremely foolish.

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Right now, while the mind is in the body, we have the freedom to choose what to do. Wouldn't it be better to spend our time preparing for the after-death state? The final goal, realizing the natural state of the luminous dharmata, innate wakefulness, is made possible by the power of your present practice. That is what is really important.

THE KARMIC BARDO OF BECOMING

The first three bardos have now been covered and we arrive at the fourth, the karmic bardo of becoming. Why is it called the karmic bardo of becoming? After death, our minds are dominated by the results of our karmic actions, combined with the twelve links of dependent origination such as ignorance, consciousness, formation and so forth. Due mainly to the accumulation of past karma, we succumb to our next rebirth. Like the others, this bardo is explained under three headings: first, how to identify it, second, how it is experienced, and finally, how to apply the instructions.

It is imperative to understand that the karmic bardo of becoming does not happen for everyone. Advanced practitioners will already have been liberated and need not undergo this bardo. So it is not necessary to mention realized practitioners here. This teaching is for the yogin practitioner of lesser capacity who has been unable to attain liberation during his lifetime, at the moment of death or in the luminous bardo of dharmata. The Tibetan word used here for yogin practitioner is *naljorpa*. *Nal* means the natural state and *jor* means to unite oneself with

that, to rest in it. A person who adheres to the natural state is called a yogin practitioner.

We may have received the pointing-out instruction and practiced a little during our lifetime, but we didn't attain real stability or progress very far. Therefore, while dying or in the bardo of dharmata we will not be liberated. There is, however, one last chance for liberation in the karmic bardo of becoming.

To attain liberation in this bardo we need to have the habit of former practice. It is not enough just to have heard teachings; we must have personally practiced them to some extent, even a very slight degree. We should at least be able to recall the instructions we received during our lifetime. To apply whatever teachings one has received, whether they are teachings on Mahamudra, Dzogchen or Madhyamika, will be very helpful in the karmic bardo of becoming. At least, we should be able to recall having recognized the path luminosity in our lifetime, the innate wakefulness free from mental constructs and beyond arising, dwelling and ceasing.

The karmic bardo of becoming is like a dream; it seems to last for only a short period. At this time we should try to be free from fear and attachment and instead remember the precious Dharma teachings and supplicate our root guru. The power of our devotion will ensure that we receive his blessings. Due to the coincidence of three factors—the blessings of our teacher, our recollection and practice of the instructions and the power of the nature of things—it is possible for us to be reborn in a natural nirmanakaya realm, one of the realms of the five buddhas, just like awakening from a dream.

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“As when awakening from a dream, they will achieve the samadhi of awareness” (p. 65). The samadhi of awareness at this time is exactly the same as what is realized in Mahamudra practice or the practice of Trekchö in Dzogchen. It is the path luminosity as described in the Madhyamika teachings: free from the four extremes and the eight constructs, not existent and not nonexistent; not both, not either; not arising, not ceasing, not singular, not plural, not permanent, not interrupted, not coming and not going. Many other teachings explain path luminosity and they all point to the same thing.

The samadhi of awareness is what enables us to take rebirth in a pure realm. What does that mean? It means that the obscuration of disturbing emotions is purified, but not the obscuration of dualistic knowledge nor that of habitual tendencies. In this situation, taking rebirth in a pure realm of one of the five buddhas, we still have to progress through the last stages of the path. *The Mirror of Mindfulness* mentions that, figuratively speaking, it takes five hundred years of practice in such a place to attain liberation. In a natural nirmanakaya realm we continue the practice of recognizing mind essence, training in that and perfecting it. Finally we arrive at the state of Buddhahood called the great primordial purity. Through that we can manifest the two forms of rupakaya — sambhogakaya and nirmanakaya — for the benefit of sentient beings.

A practitioner who has attained a certain degree of stability in practice, who is not a complete beginner, who has not broken the tantric commitments or samayas with the teacher and vajra friends, and who has some power resulting from past practice will experience the bardo of becoming for only a fleeting

moment, like awakening after a short dream. Actually such a person does not really undergo the bardo of becoming because he is liberated into a pure realm very quickly, but he has a short experience of it and so it must be included here. Such a person will not have to enter a new womb and take rebirth.

Right now we have a physical body composed of flesh and blood, the elements and aggregates and a mind. We understand, perceive and experience, and are called a living human being. When these constituents separate, we are a dead person, a disembodied consciousness. The only difference from the experience of this life is that body and mind have separated.

Earlier I explained what we experience when the external breath ceases and the experience that arises after the inner breath has ceased: At this point one experiences the luminosity of dharmata with its accompanying manifestations of colors, sounds and lights. Unable to remain stable in innate wakefulness, our habitual tendencies cause our consciousness to assume the form of a mental body and continue to the bardo of becoming. The actual bardo of becoming is defined as “the period beginning from the arising of the confused tendencies up until one enters the womb of the next life” (p. 66). While the mental body travels through the bardo of becoming seeking a place to be reborn, one is frightened, filled with despair. One experiences incredible suffering during this state.

What appears, what is experienced during the bardo of becoming? An ordinary person is someone who has not received the oral teachings and has therefore not been able to put them into practice. “In addition, their predominant karmic obscuration

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makes it difficult to form the right frame of mind or to arrange an auspicious coincidence through an instruction such as phowa" (p. 67). It is difficult for people at the moment of death to practice phowa if they lack the power of practice or have obscured their minds by breaking tantric commitments. One's consciousness roams through the bardo state like a leaf blown by the wind. It is of great benefit at this point to have some accumulation of merit and have purified negative actions, or to have a link with a spiritual teacher, whether positive or negative.

All the problems experienced in the bardo of becoming and afterwards, in the next life, spring from one cause: the fact that during this lifetime we did not acknowledge our inherent nature, the enlightened essence. Not having recognized our basic nature when it was laid bare in the luminous bardo of dharmata with its manifestations of sounds, colors, lights and peaceful and wrathful deities, we became terrified and fainted. Trying to escape these overwhelming and formidable pure appearances we finally arrived at the karmic bardo of becoming. This tendency to avoid recognizing the nature of mind and to escape from the pure appearances back into a dualistic setup is the very cause that propels us to a new rebirth in one of the six realms of samsara.

Exiting the unconditioned bardo of dharmata we again mount the wheel of the twelve links of dependent origination, spinning through the links of ignorance, formation, consciousness and further into the aggregates of name-and-form, and so forth, endlessly. Some of these twelve links are disturbing emotions, some are sufferings and some are creation of karma. For example, ignorance is a disturbing emotion, formation is karma, and so forth. But in fact, each fol-

lowing link depends upon the former. As this wheel continues to spin, it carries one to the next rebirth.

Ignorance, the first link, is the fact of failing to recognize ground luminosity, our basic buddha nature. Out of confusion and ignorance, thoughts arise in our mind in the form of attraction towards one thing, aversion towards another, or simply a feeling of indifference. These thoughts become more and more solidified so that we start to grasp, and increasingly stronger fixation results.

At this time we possess a so-called mental body that is not composed of physical substance like the body we have right now. It seems to be solid because it is composed of the essences of the five elements, and so we still feel hungry and so forth. Although we cannot eat material food at this time, we do feel the need for sustenance. It is said that the mental body in the bardo state lives on smells. However, the deceased person can only partake of these smells in the form of burnt offerings that are especially dedicated to that purpose.

Furthermore, at this time we have some level of clairvoyance and can perceive the thoughts of others. Because the white and red elements from one's father and mother are absent in this mental body, we do not perceive an external sun and moon. But the mental body is somewhat luminous so that wherever we go is lit up by our own radiance. When returning to our home we see our relatives and try to talk to them, but they cannot perceive our mental body and therefore do not respond. We see that they have started to spend our money and to use our belongings so we may feel angry and upset, as well as very attached to our former possessions.

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The deceased person can instantly travel anywhere except for two places. One cannot go to the womb of a new mother nor to the Vajra Seat at Bodhgaya in India.¹ We arrive at a new place, simultaneously with the intention to be there. The realization that we are dead can suddenly strike us when we notice that our feet make no imprint on the ground and our body is not reflected in a mirror. Now we begin to feel very afraid, thinking, "Could it be that I am dead?" Slowly we discover that this is in fact true.

The experiences of the bardo of becoming are exclusively the product of our personal karma. For some it may be briefly very pleasant and then change to being intensely dreadful. It is said that the five elements arise as enemies; some beings may feel burned, flushed away or blown apart. But again that is due to one's individual karmic phenomena. Some people who have killed insects and animals may experience such animals and insects chasing them, trying to eat them or rip them into pieces.

There have been rare cases where the consciousness, having left the body, actually returns to the corpse, revives it and continues to live. In Tibetan this is called returning from the dead. Although the spirit of the deceased cannot be seen by ordinary human beings, it is perceived by people who are clairvoyant or have a high level of realization. But spirits can see each other because they share the same status; they are the same class of beings. One story refers to a man who passed away and in the bardo of becoming met someone else who had also died. The second deceased person said, "This is

1. Sometimes the Vajra Seat refers to the indestructible state of enlightenment.

dreadful. When alive, I hid a lot of gold inside the wall of my house and I am really attached to it. Unless somebody can take it out and use it, I will be stuck here for a very long time." In the bardo of becoming, the spirit of the dead person has clairvoyance and can foresee the future. He said, "You are going to return and live again. Please go and tell my family who live in such-and-such a place that gold is concealed in the wall of such-and-such room. Please tell them to take it out, spend it virtuously and dedicate the merit on my behalf." The first person did indeed revive again. He acted as requested by the dead person and, just as specified, the relatives found the gold and spent it on his behalf.

There are only two types of people who do not enter the bardo of becoming. One type is advanced practitioners who are immediately liberated at death or in the bardo of dharmata. The other is extremely evil people who out of hate and spite have killed many, many people: they go straight to the hell realms. Apart from these two cases, all living beings experience the bardo of becoming after death for approximately forty-nine days, but this is only an average, not fixed. In some cases, people can remain in the bardo of becoming for months or years. During these seven weeks the deceased spirit re-experiences dying and reviving in the bardo state once every seven days.

Immense benefit results if other people do spiritual practice on behalf of a person who has passed away, especially during the first four days after death. Furthermore, at this time there is tremendous effect when a close Dharma friend reads aloud the teachings called *Liberation through Hearing in the Bardo*.

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Someone who has attained powers through the practice of the three samadhis can summon the consciousness of the deceased person. It is the nature of things that the powerless consciousness of the dead person will appear before such a practitioner. He can then expound the Dharma and give final instructions such as, "Now this is happening to you. Do not be afraid. Do not be distracted! This is how to practice. Do such and such." There are many stories from the past about how extremely effective and beneficial such instruction can be for the deceased.

There is great benefit when other people do spiritual practice on behalf of the deceased during the forty-nine days of the bardo of becoming. The greatest chance for the deceased person to attain liberation occurs every seven days, i.e., on the seventh and then on the fourteenth day after passing away, etc. That is why special ceremonies for the deceased person are often done on those days.

It is best if a spiritual master is requested to do something for the person who has passed away. In this case, "master" means someone who has understanding of emptiness and possesses the confidence of realization. Therefore any virtuous act he performs, such as a feast offering or ceremonial ritual that accumulates merit, becomes the combination of conditioned and unconditional virtue. If a great living master cannot be reached, someone with pure motivation can at least chant the sutras etc., or make offerings to the enlightened beings and dedicate the merit to the person who has passed away. Great benefit also results from that.

Halfway through these seven weeks a dividing point emerges. The first half of the bardo of becoming is dominated by the experiences and habitual

way of perceiving things that belonged to one's former life. The second half is dominated in a progressively stronger way by the character of the next rebirth one is about to take. Our next rebirth depends in part on which of the six disturbing emotions is strongest in our mind. This does not mean that we lack the other five poisons, but that the most dominant of the six emotions of attachment, anger, delusion, pride, envy or avarice determines in which of the six realms we will take rebirth.

Because the essence of these disturbing emotions is wisdom, it is possible to be liberated by recognizing their nature. Due to not recognizing that nature, we ended up in the bardo of becoming and continue to wander in samsara.

Different colors appear in the bardo of becoming, pale lackluster colors that represent each of the six realms. White light appears if one is to be born as a deva in the realm of the gods, red appears for the demigod realm, blue for human beings, green for animals, pale yellow for hungry ghosts, and grey or black if one is to be born in a hell realm (*p. 70*).

If you are to be reborn in our world as a human being in one of the unfree states you will have the experience of entering a mist. If you, on the other hand, are about to obtain a precious human body in which you can practice the Dharma, then you experience entering a beautiful city.

When taking rebirth as a human being, the consciousness enters the womb of the mother. There is an indication as to whether one will be born male or female: when strongly attracted to one's future father, one will be born a female; if strongly attracted to one's future mother, one will be born a male. One also feels aggression towards the parent of the same

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sex. Even if one is not born through a womb but is instantly reborn through what is called miraculous birth, aversion and attachment are still manifest. One is always born with a combination of these two emotions.

Tsele Rinpoche states that it is easier to recognize our nature, the ground luminosity, during the bardo of dharmata and the bardo of becoming than in the bardo of this life. Even if we do recognize it now, it is difficult to train and progress. Even if we attain some degree of stability it is difficult to become totally liberated. Nevertheless, *The Mirror of Mindfulness* and other meditation manuals state that liberation is quite easy during the bardo of dharmata and the bardo of becoming. Why is that?

At present our consciousness, which is called 'prana-and-mind-indivisible,' is encased in a physical body. When imprisoned in a material body the mind is not really free. But in the bardo states of dharmata and becoming the mind and body are separate until we enter the womb of the next life. During this time the mind is ungrounded and unfettered by an 'encasement;' thus it is easy to recognize, train and attain stability in those two bardos.

The possibility of liberation all comes down to this: during the bardo of this life, we must train and become acquainted with the path luminosity. If we are totally acquainted with this luminosity, meaning stable in that experience, then at best we will not have to undergo the bardos at all. According to the degree of stability we will definitely attain enlightenment either at the moment of death, in the luminous bardo of dharmata or in the bardo of becoming. There is no doubt about this.

Certain practices done now will facilitate recognition of mind essence during the after-death experience. In dream yoga and the practice of illusory body, we try now to get used to this idea, "This is just a dream. Everything is illusory and dream-like. I am already dead. Nothing is real. All these appearances I perceive are unreal and insubstantial." To have this habit imprinted in our mind makes much it much easier when we actually are dead to recognize that fact, apply the oral instructions and attain liberation.

Tilopa told Naropa, "One is not fettered by appearances but by attachment. So cut your attachment, Naropa!" In all the different teachings, the main thing that must be cut is not our experience but our attachment, fixation, and clinging to these experiences. That is the main objective.

The primary obstacle to liberation in the bardo of becoming is lack of confidence in the view. We may have recognized the view but unfortunately failed to gain stability in that recognition. Another thing that really creates a great hindrance in the bardo state is attachment to our former possessions or strong resentment. Before passing away or while dying it is therefore extremely important to totally give up the thought of anything or anyone towards which we can be either angry or attached. Otherwise, if these negative thought states recur during the bardo state, they make liberation very difficult.

The Mirror of Mindfulness and Liberation Through Hearing in the Bardo give instructions on how to block the gate to rebirth when about to enter the mother's womb. It is possible to avoid rebirth and instead attain liberation. The best means is simply to rest in the view of Mahamudra, Dzogchen or

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Madhyamika. If we cannot do that, then we should visualize the father and mother as the deity with consort and avoid taking rebirth at this point. Otherwise, our desire and aversion helplessly drag us into another life. It is important to take care not to let that happen.

When about to take rebirth the best means to apply is the completion stage; next best is the development stage. Through these methods we can quickly perfect the practice of recognizing mind essence and attaining liberation. But if we are completely unable to do either and have no control over our state of mind, then we should form a strong aspiration and supplicate our root guru, saying, "I have no power to choose, so please bestow your blessings that I may be born in a situation where I can connect with the teachings, receive the oral instructions, and quickly progress along the paths and stages toward enlightenment. Please make sure that I am not born as an ordinary person; let me attain a precious human body!" Due to the coincidence of the blessings of the buddhas and bodhisattvas, the nature of things and the power of such an aspiration, it is possible to be born in a situation in which one can reconnect with the teachings.

What can others do for someone who has passed away? Many things can be done to help the dying person: different rituals can be performed, certain sacred substances can be put into the mouth of the dying person, the *Liberation Through Hearing in the Bardo* can be recited and a sacred image called 'liberation through wearing' can be attached to the body. It is especially effective when a realized master performs a ritual in which he summons the consciousness of the deceased person to come before

him, and then dissolves it into a certain image upon which he then confers the four empowerments. At each initiation he gives a clear introduction to mind essence. This ritual, called name-burning, is extremely beneficial in aiding the dead person.

I would like to tell the following story. Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche was one of three brothers. One brother was Sangye Nyenpa Rinpoche who was a great lama. The other was not an advanced practitioner but had met His Holiness the 16th Karmapa several times. The Karmapa liked him a lot and they always bantered together. Karmapa would call him a joker and play around with him.

While Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche and his brothers were travelling from Eastern to Central Tibet, this third brother died. Before dying he had fallen, hit his front tooth and broken it off. Although this brother died en route, Khyentse Rinpoche and his brother Sangye Nyenpa continued to Central Tibet where they met His Holiness the Karmapa, who said, "I have already met your brother. He came by some time ago. He had broken his tooth but seemed to be doing quite well."

There was no way Karmapa could have heard that Khyentse Rinpoche's brother had died during the journey and even if he had heard, it was extremely unlikely that he would know that the tooth was broken. But somehow he knew. Khyentse Rinpoche was astounded and said, "How can you know these things? This is really amazing." Karmapa said, "There is not much point in talking about this. I am a Karmapa. Certain qualities have developed due to past aspirations and practice, but there is no need to mention them. But one thing always happens: all those whom I have met during this lifetime, whether

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we have a good or bad connection, always come and visit me after they die before continuing on. I can help some, but not everybody. Anyway, your brother did not seem to have any problem.”

There is another story about my grandfather, Chimey Dorje, who seems to have been quite an advanced practitioner. He was in retreat and my father, Tulku Ugyen Rinpoche, was his servant. While he was in retreat, many of Chimey Dorje's disciples lived near him. One of them, a nun, suddenly heard that her father had died and was filled with sadness and despair. She ran straight to Chimey Dorje's retreat hut and knocked on his door, shouting, "Please, please you must do something quickly! My father has died!" Referring to the ritual for summoning the deceased consciousness, the nun pleaded, "Please do the name-burning immediately so that my father does not have time to take a bad rebirth." She was so insistent that Chimey Dorje told Tulku Ugyen Rinpoche, "Arrange the ritual objects." Everything necessary was laid before Chimey Dorje and the dead man's name was written on a piece of paper mounted on a stick. Then Chimey Dorje started summoning the consciousness. He did so once, twice, and then suddenly said, "This is pointless!" He put his vajra and bell down and said, "Pack these things up. There is no reason to continue. The nun's father is not dead." Tulku Ugyen Rinpoche said, "But please, the nun has said that he is dead. He has stopped breathing and is already taken to the charnel ground. The only thing that remains to be done is to chop up the body and feed it to the birds." Chimey Dorje said, "No, no! At least I know whether a person is dead or not, whether the consciousness arrives. I might not be completely enlightened but I do know

this much." The next day a man arrived on horseback and said that the nun's father had been carried off to the cemetery, but while he was lying there he actually woke up again and so they took him home. He was not dead.

The name-burning ritual for a dead person is best performed by a master who has the confidence of realization. Then there is no question about the benefit. Any lama or Buddhist priest can of course read the ritual aloud, but that is not enough. Moreover, it has to be performed with the pure motivation of truly wanting to help. Even if a practitioner is not realized and doesn't possess the power to summon the consciousness, if his motivation is pure there will still be some benefit for the dead person.

Furthermore, there is the tradition of performing virtuous deeds and dedicating their merit to the person who has passed away. This should be done in a proper way because the deceased person has the ability to perceive the participant's frame of mind and to know the effect of what has been done. Never slaughter animals to celebrate someone's death. It is important that anything that is done be done in a pure way. If a great practitioner has died he or she is already liberated and does not need any further help. But if the deceased is not an advanced practitioner, rituals and meritorious actions are of great benefit.

Nevertheless, to ensure liberation it is not sufficient just to have someone else do rituals or good deeds for you after you die. You must acquaint yourself with practice right now while you are still alive. Someone who has realized the ultimate truth of the natural state, totally beyond mental constructs, does not have to undergo these bardos. The bardo states

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are only experienced by people who have not recognized the ultimate truth and actualized it.

This concludes the teachings on the four bardos. Some people may think that bardo teachings are a specialty and not of chief importance in Buddhist studies. They may think that these teachings are something that one might study on the side, that they are not really the main point. That attitude shows a lack of understanding. Everything that we experience in life and death takes place during one of the four bardo states and all the Buddhist teachings are given to enable the individual to deal with those states and attain liberation.

AFTERWORD

My mother Kunsang Dechen passed away on April 24, 1991. Though she had suffered from the painful disease of pancreatic cancer for months, she never uttered one word of complaint. Asked to write a eulogy relating her life and death to the teachings expressed in this book, I feel this is best said in her own words: "Now that my time to die has come I have no attachments whatsoever. When I was young, I was afraid of death. For that reason I practiced diligently my whole life. Now I have arrived at the brink of death. I have heard that the best practitioner is happy to die. The next best is fearless and the lowest has no regrets. I do not have any fears or regrets. The moment this trap of my material body falls apart, I will fly off like a bird escaping from a snare. My prayer now is a request that the lineage holders have long lives in order to benefit all beings. It is my wish that I can take upon myself whatever physical obstacle any of the lineage holders may experience so that they can be free of them. That is my aspiration."

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ABHIDHARMA (chos mngon pa). One of the three parts of the Tripitaka, the Words of the Buddha. Systematic teachings on metaphysics focusing on developing discriminating knowledge by analyzing elements of experience and investigating the nature of existing things. The chief commentaries on Abhidharma are the Abhidharma Kosha by Dignaga from the Hinayana perspective and the Abhidharma Samucchaya by Asanga from the Mahayana point of view.

ACCUMULATION OF MERIT (bsod nams kyi tshogs). Virtuous actions or meditation practice carried out with conceptual mind; for instance, the concepts of oneself, the deed and the purpose.

ACCUMULATION OF WISDOM (ye shes kyi tshogs). Virtuous actions or meditation practice embraced by the discriminating knowledge of insight into emptiness, naked mind free from conceptual thinking.

ALL-GROUND (kun gzhi, Skt. alaya). Literally it means the 'foundation of all things.' The basis of mind and both pure and impure phenomena. This word has different meanings in different contexts and should be understood accordingly. Sometimes, it is synonymous with buddha nature or dharmakaya, sometimes it refers to a neutral state of dualistic mind that has not been embraced by innate wakefulness.

ALL-ENCOMPASSING PURITY OF APPEARANCE AND EXISTENCE (snang srid dag pa rab 'byams). A term used especially in the teachings of the Inner Tantras demonstrating that all phenomena are inherently perfect; the five aggregates are the five male buddhas, and so forth.

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APPEARANCE (snang ba). 1) A sense impression or mental occurrence; anything that is experienced by a conscious mind. A normal person always feels that appearances are 'out there' and separate from the perceiver, while in the Buddhist philosophy of Mahayana appearances are understood first to be only mental events, then empty of inherent existence, and finally beyond constructs such as arising, dwelling and ceasing. In Vajrayana, i.e. from the viewpoint of self-existing wakefulness, appearances are primordially indivisible from emptiness and therefore a pure expression of the male and female buddhas and bodhisattvas; this is called 'all-encompassing purity of what appears and exists.' 2) One of the three subtle dissolution stages.

ARHANT (dgra bcom pa). 'Foe destroyer;' someone who has conquered the four maras and attained nirvana, the fourth and final result of the Hinayana path.

ATI YOGA (shin tu rnal 'byor). The third of the Three Inner Tantras. It emphasizes, according to Jamgön Kongtrül the First, the view that liberation is attained through growing accustomed to insight into the nature of primordial enlightenment, free from accepting and rejecting, hope and fear. The more common word for Ati Yoga nowadays is 'Dzogchen,' the Great Perfection.

ATTAINMENT (thob pa). The third of the three experiences of appearance, increase and attainment. This experience corresponds to the dissolving of the seven thought states resulting from stupidity and is accompanied by a perception of darkness.

AVADHUTI (Skt). The central subtle channel within the body. It runs from the base of the spine to the crown of the head.

AWARENESS (rig pa). When referring to the view of the Great Perfection or Essence Mahamudra, 'awareness' means consciousness devoid of ignorance and dualistic fixation.

BARDO OF BECOMING (srid pa'i bar do). The period from the arising of confusion and one's emergence in a mental body until entering the womb of the next life. It is the time of seeking a new rebirth. The word 'becoming' here also means 'possibility.'

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BARDO OF DHARMATA (chos nyid kyi bar do). The period from dying until emerging in the mental body of the bardo of becoming. Dharmata means 'innate nature.' In the short version of the *Bardo Tantra of the Union of the Sun and Moon*, concealed as a terma by Padmasambhava and revealed by Pema Lingpa, the bardo of dharmata is described as a sequence of seven very subtle dissolution stages: 'consciousness dissolving into space.' Then follows 'space dissolving into luminosity,' 'luminosity dissolving into union,' 'union dissolving into wisdom,' 'wisdom dissolving into spontaneous presence,' 'spontaneous presence dissolving into primordial purity' and finally 'the omniscient wisdom of primordial purity dissolving into the threefold wisdom of unity.' These stages are described in *The Mirror of Mindfulness*, pgs. 51-60.

The bardo of dharmata is when the appearances of this lifetime have subsided, there is no physical body, and no conditioned experience. Everything perceived is 'pure phenomena,' the sounds, colors and lights of dharmata, our innate nature. The person who has not gained stability in this state will again fall prey to ignorance and habitual tendencies: dualistic experience re-occurs and the bardo of becoming begins.

BARDO OF DREAMING (rmi lam gyi bar do). The period from falling asleep until waking up again. This duration should also be embraced by the oral instructions of one's teacher.

BARDO OF DYING ('chi kha'i bar do). The period from the onset of the process of dying until the end of the three subtle dissolution stages.

BARDO OF MEDITATION (bsam gtan gyi bar do). The bardo of the meditation state takes place within the bardo of this life. When a practitioner has received the pointing-out instruction, this bardo is the period beginning with recognizing the mind essence and ending when being distracted therefrom.

BARDO OF THIS LIFE (skye gnas kyi bar do). The period from being conceived in the womb until meeting with an irre-

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versible cause of death. 'This life' literally means 'being born and remaining alive.'

BHUMI (sa). The bodhisattvas; the ten stages a bodhisattva proceeds through on the quest for complete and perfect enlightenment. These ten stages correspond to the last three of the five paths of Mahayana. See also 'ten bhumis.'

BINDUS (thig le) 1) The red and white essences. 2) Spheres or circles of light.

BLACKNESS (nag lam). An experience of utter blackness which is the third stage of appearance, increase and attainment.

BLISS, CLARITY, AND NONTHOUGHT (bde gsal mi rtog pa). Three temporary meditation experiences. Fixation on them plants the seeds for rebirth in the three realms of samsara. Without fixation, they are adornments of the three kayas.

BODHICHITTA (byang sems, byang chub kyi sems). 'Awakened state of mind.' 1) The aspiration to attain enlightenment for the sake of all beings. 2) In the context of Dzogchen or Mahamudra, the innate wakefulness of awakened mind; synonymous with *rigpa*, awareness. 3) The drop of liquid that sometimes appears from the nostrils after passing away.

BODHICHITTA OF APPLICATION ('jug pa'i byang chub kyi sems). Having taken the bodhisattva vow, the practitioner tries to implement the wish to liberate all beings. Comprised chiefly of the practices of the six paramitas.

BODHICHITTA OF ASPIRATION (smon pa'i byang chub kyi sems). Motivated by love and compassion for all sentient beings, the practitioner engenders the wish to liberate all beings from the samsaric existence. Comprised chiefly of the four immeasurables.

BODHISATTVA (byang chub sems dpa'). Someone who has developed bodhichitta, the aspiration to attain enlightenment in order to benefit all sentient beings; especially a noble bodhisattva who has attained the first level.

BUDDHA (sangs rgyas). The Enlightened or Awakened One who has completely abandoned all obscurations and perfected every good quality. A perfected bodhisattva after

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attaining true and complete enlightenment is known as a buddha. The Buddha generally referred to is Shakyamuni Buddha, the buddha of this era, who lived in India around the 6th century B.C. There have been innumerable buddhas in past aeons who manifested the way to enlightenment. In the current Good Aeon, there will be one thousand buddhas of which Buddha Shakyamuni is the fourth.

BUDDHA SAMANTABHADRA (sangs rgyas kun tu bzang po). The primordially enlightened state of buddhahood from whom all other buddhas of the peaceful and wrathful mandalas emanate. This buddha principle is the ultimate source of all the tantras of Vajrayana.

BUDDHA SHAKYAMUNI (sangs rgyas sha kya thub pa). The historical Buddha, regarded as the chief teacher of our present age.

BUDDHAFIELD (sangs rgyas kyi zhing khams). According to the sutras, a pure realm manifested through the aspirations of a bodhisattva in conjunction with the virtue of sentient beings. According to the tantras, an expression of the enlightened state. There are buddhafi elds that are pure sambhogakaya, half sambhogakaya and half nirmanakaya, and also the 'natural nirmanakaya' realms, such as Sukhavati, the pure land of Buddha Amitabha, in which a practitioner can take rebirth during the bardo of becoming through a combination of pure faith, sufficient merit, and one-pointed determination.

CAUSE AND EFFECT (rgyu 'bras). 1) The natural law of dependent origination. 2) The law of karma.

CHANG (chang). Tibetan beer brewed from barley.

CHITI YOGA (spyi ti'i rnal 'byor). One of the subdivisions of the Instruction Section of Dzogchen: Ati, Chiti and Yangti. Chiti is defined as covering the general points of Dzogchen.

CHOKGYUR LINGPA (1829-1870). A treasure revealer and contemporary of Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo and Jamgön Kongtrül. Regarded as one of the major tertöns in Tibetan history, his termas are widely practiced by both the Kagyü and Nyingma schools. For more details see *The*

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Life and Teachings of Chokgyur Lingpa, Rangjung Yeshe Publications.

- COEMERGENT** (lhan cig skyes pa). Born together; coincidence of the nature of things (natural or innate.)
- COMPLETION STAGE** (rdzogs rim). 'Completion stage with marks' means yogic practices such as tummo. 'Completion stage without marks' is the practice of Dzogchen. See also 'development and completion.'
- CONCENTRATION** (ting nge 'dzin, Skt. samadhi). A state of one-pointed attention. See 'samadhi.'
- CONCEPTUAL IGNORANCE** (kun tu brtags pa'i ma rig pa). In Vajrayana, the ignorance of conceptualizing subject and object; conceptual thinking. In the Sutra system, conceptual ignorance means superimposed or 'learned' wrong views; gross general beliefs that obscure the nature of things.
- DAKA** (dpa' bo). 1) Emanation of the chief figure in the mandala to fulfill the four activities; male counterpart of dakinis. 2) Male enlightened practitioner of Vajrayana.
- DAKINI** (mkha' 'gro ma). 1) Spiritual beings who fulfill the enlightened activities; female tantric deities who protect and serve the Buddhist doctrine and practitioners. Also one of the 'Three Roots.' 2) Female enlightened practitioner of Vajrayana.
- DEMIGOD** (lha ma yin). One of the six classes of beings whose mentality is dominated by competitiveness and warfare.
- DEPENDENT ORIGINATION** (rten cing 'brel bar 'byung ba). The natural law that all phenomena arise 'dependent upon' their own causes 'in connection with' their individual conditions. The fact that no phenomena appear without a cause and none are made by an uncaused creator. Everything arises exclusively due to and dependent upon the coincidence of causes and conditions without which they cannot possibly appear.
- DEVELOPMENT STAGE** (bskyed rim, Skt. utpattikrama). One of the two aspects of Vajrayana practice. The mental creation of pure images in order to purify habitual tendencies. The essence of the development stage is 'pure per-

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ception' or 'sacred outlook,' which means to perceive sights, sounds and thoughts as deity, mantra and wisdom.

DHARMA (chos). The Buddha's teachings. Sometimes 'dharma' can mean phenomena or mental objects, as well as attributes or qualities.

DHARMADHATU (chos kyi dbyings). The 'realm of phenomena'; the suchness in which emptiness and dependent origination are inseparable. The nature of mind and phenomena which lies beyond arising, dwelling and ceasing. In his *Buddha Nature*, Thrangu Rinpoche said: "In this context, the word for space is *ying*. It is the same word used in dharmadhatu, the realm or 'space' of things. The word space is used because the dharmadhatu is like the body or realm of empty space where different things, like clouds, birds, and airplanes can fly around without obstruction. This is because the nature of space is empty and nonexistent. Due to this quality of openness, things can occur. Likewise, dharmadhatu is the essence of things—empty and inconcrete—where all phenomena such as trees, houses, mountains, oneself, other beings, emotions, wisdom, and all experiences can occur openly."

DHARMAKAYA (chos sku). The first of the three kayas, which is devoid of constructs, like space. The 'body' of enlightened qualities. Should be understood in three different senses, according to ground, path and fruition.

DHARMATA (chos nyid). The innate nature of phenomena and mind.

DISSOLUTION STAGES (thim rim). In this book defined as three types: the gross dissolution of the elements, the subtle dissolution of the thought states, and the very subtle dissolution stages during the bardo of dharmata. For the last see also 'bardo of dharmata.'

DISTURBING EMOTION (nyon mongs pa). The five poisons of desire, anger, delusion, pride, and envy which tire, disturb, and torment one's mind. The perpetuation of these disturbing emotions is one of the main causes of samsaric existence.

DUALISTIC KNOWLEDGE (gnyis snang gi shes pa). Experience structured as 'perceiver' and 'object perceived.'

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DZOGCHEN (rdzogs pa chen po, Skt. Mahasandhi). Also known as Great Perfection and Ati Yoga. The highest teachings of the Nyingma School of the Early Translations. In this world the best-known human lineage masters are Garab Dorje, Manjushrimitra, Shri Singha, Jnanasutra, Vimalamitra, Padmasambhava and Vairochana. Dzogchen has two chief aspects: the lineage of scriptures and the lineage of teachings. In addition, numerous Dzogchen teachings were concealed as treasures (termas) by these masters and revealed through the following centuries. The lineage of teachings is embodied in the oral instructions one receives personally from a qualified master and holder of the Dzogchen lineage.

EIGHT GREAT CHARIOTS OF THE PRACTICE LINEAGE (sgrub brgyud shing rta brgyad). The eight independent schools of Buddhism that flourished in Tibet: Nyingma, Kadam, Marpa Kagyü, Shangpa Kagyü, Sakya, Jordruk, Nyendrub, Shije and Chö. Today only the first five survive as independent lineages.

EIGHT PRACTICE LINEAGES (sgrub brgyud brgyad). See *above*.

EIGHT WORLDLY CONCERNS ('jig rten chos brgyad). Attachment to gain, pleasure, praise and fame, and aversion to loss, pain, blame and bad reputation.

EMPOWERMENT (dbang). The conferring of power or authorization to practice the Vajrayana teachings, the indispensable entrance door to tantric practice. Empowerment gives control over one's innate vajra body, vajra speech and vajra mind and the authority to regard forms as deity, sounds as mantra and thoughts as wisdom. See also 'four empowerments.'

ENLIGHTENED ESSENCE (bde gshegs snying po, sugata garbha). In this book, used as a synonym for 'buddha nature.'

FEAST OFFERING (tshogs kyi 'khor lo). A feast assembly performed by Vajrayana practitioners to accumulate merit and purify the sacred commitments.

FIVE AGGREGATES (phung po lnga). The five aspects which comprise the physical and mental constituents of a sen-

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tient being: physical forms, sensations, conceptions, formations, and consciousnesses.

FIVE PATHS (*lam lnga*). The paths of accumulation, joining, seeing, cultivation and beyond training. These five paths cover the entire process from sincerely beginning Dharma practice to complete enlightenment.

FIVE PERFECTIONS (*phun sum tshogs pa lnga*). The perfect teacher, retinue, place, teaching, and time. These five attributes characterize the sambhogakaya realms.

FIVE SUPERKNOWLEDGES (*mngon shes lnga*). The capacities for performing miracles, divine sight, divine hearing, recollection of former lives, and cognition of the minds of others.

FIVE WISDOMS (*ye shes lnga*). The dharmadhatu wisdom, mirror-like wisdom, wisdom of equality, discriminating wisdom, and all-accomplishing wisdom. They represent five distinct functions of the tathagatagarbha.

FOUR EMPOWERMENTS (*dbang bzhi*). The vase, secret, wisdom-knowledge and precious word empowerments. Padmasambhava says in the *Lamrim Yeshe Nyingpo*: "The vase empowerment that purifies the body and the nadis is the seed of the vajra body and nirmanakaya. The secret empowerment that purifies the speech and the pranās is the seed of the vajra speech and sambhogakaya. The phonyā empowerment which purifies the mind and the essences is the seed of the vajra mind and dharmakaya. The ultimate empowerment which purifies the habitual patterns of the all-ground is the seed of the vajra wisdom and svabhavikakaya."

FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS (*'phags pa'i bden pa bzhi*). The four truths are the truth of suffering, of origin, of the cessation, and of the path. The truth of suffering refers to the world and the beings. The truth of origin refers to karmic actions and disturbing emotions. The truth of cessation is state of having relinquished both the karmas and disturbing emotions along with their effects. The truth of the path is the paths and levels of Buddhism, the ultimate solution to suffering. The truth of suffering is like a sickness, the truth of origin is the cause of the sickness, the truth of cessation is like having recovered from the sick-

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ness, and the truth of the path is like following a cure for the sickness. These four truths can be understood in increasingly deeper ways as the practitioner progresses through the three vehicles.

FOUR PHILOSOPHICAL SCHOOLS (grub mtha' bzhi). See 'philosophical schools.'

FRUITION ('bras bu). The end of the path. Usually the state of complete and perfect buddhahood. Can also refer to one of the three levels of enlightenment of a shravaka, pratyekabuddha or bodhisattva. See also 'view, meditation, action and fruition.'

FUNCTION (thugs rje). In Dzogchen, one of the three aspects: essence, nature, and function; the natural expression of the indivisibility of emptiness and luminosity.

GAMPOPA (sgam po pa) (1079-1153). Foremost disciple of Milarepa, who possessed both supreme realization and great scholarship. He was the author of *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation*. After he studied and practiced the Kadampa teachings, at the age of 32 he met Jetsun Milarepa, of whom he was to become the foremost disciple. Among his main disciples were the first Karmapa Düsum Khyenpa and Phagmo Drubpa.

GELUG (dge lugs). The Tibetan school of Buddhism founded by Lord Tsongkhapa as a reformation of the Kadam tradition of Atisha Dipamkara. The present head is H.H. the 14th Dalai Lama.

GOD (lha). In this context 'god' refers to one of the six classes of beings.

GROUND LUMINOSITY (gzhi'i 'od gsal). Synonymous with Mother Luminosity, dharmakaya.

GROUND LUMINOSITY OF FULL ATTAINMENT (nyer thob gzhi'i 'od gsal). The luminosity of dharmakaya that dawns right after the three subtle dissolution stages of whiteness, redness and blackness.

GURU (bla ma). Spiritual teacher.

HABITUAL TENDENCIES (bag chags). Subtle inclinations imprinted in the all-ground consciousness.

HINAYANA (theg pa dman pa). The vehicles focused on contemplation of the four noble truths and the twelve links

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of dependent origination for the sake of individual liberation.

- HUNGRY GHOSTS** (yid dvags). One of the six classes of sentient beings, tormented by their own impure karmic perception which causes them to suffer tremendously from craving, hunger and thirst.
- IGNORANCE** (ma rig pa). Ignorance of good and evil deeds causes us to take rebirth in the three realms of samsara. Ignorance of the ultimate truth is the main cause of samsaric existence.
- ILLUSORY BODY** (sgyu lus). One of the Six Doctrines of Naropa.
- INCREASE** (mched pa). The second of the three experiences of appearance, increase and attainment. Corresponding to the dissolving of the 40 thought states resulting from desire and accompanied by a perception of redness.
- INNATE WAKEFULNESS** (rang gnas kyi ye shes). The basic nature of our mind.
- INSTRUCTION SECTION** (man ngag sde). The third of the Three Sections of Dzogchen, arranged by Manjushrimitra and emphasizing the special key points.
- JAMBU CONTINENT** ('dzam bu gling). Our known world. The southernmost of the four continents, in classical Buddhist cosmology, so called because it is adorned with the jambubriksha (rose apple) tree.
- JAMYANG KHYENTSE WANGPO** ('jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse'i dbang po, 1820-1892). A great master of the last century. He was the last of the Five Great Tertöns and was regarded as the combined reincarnation of Vimalamitra and King Trisong Deutsen. He became the master and teacher of all the Buddhist schools of Tibet and the founder of the Rimey movement. There are ten volumes of his works in addition to his termas.
- KAGYÜ** (bka' brgyud). The lineage of teachings brought to Tibet by Lord Marpa, received from the dharmakaya buddha Vajradhara by the Indian siddha Tilopa, Saraha, and others. Transmitted by Naropa and Maitripa to the Tibetan translator Marpa, the lineage was passed on to Milarepa, Gampopa, Karmapa and others. The main emphasis is on the path of means which is the Six doctrines

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of Naropa, and the path of liberation which is the Mahamudra instructions of Maitripa.

KAMA (bka' ma). The Oral Lineage of the Nyingma School, the body of teachings translated chiefly during the period of Guru Rinpoche's stay in Tibet and transmitted from master to student, until the present day.

KARMA (las). The unerring law that virtuous actions yield virtuous results, etc.

KHENPO (mkhan po). A title for one who has completed the major course of studies of about ten years' duration of the traditional branches of Buddhist philosophy, logic, Vinaya and so forth. Can also refer to the abbot of a monastery or the preceptor from whom one receives ordination.

KONGTRÜL LODRÖ THAYE (1813-1899). Also known as Jamgön Kongtrül Lodrö Thaye and by his tertön name Chimey Yungdrung Lingpa. He was at the forefront of the Rimey movement of the 19th century. Renowned as an accomplished master, scholar and writer, he authored more than 100 volumes of scriptures. The best known are his Five Treasuries, among which are the 63 volumes of the Rinchen Terdzö, the terma literature of the one hundred great tertöns.

LEARNING, REFLECTION AND MEDITATION (thos bsam sgom gsum). 'Learning' means receiving oral teachings and studying scriptures in order to clear away ignorance and wrong views. 'Reflection' is to eradicate uncertainty and misunderstanding through carefully thinking over the subject. 'Meditation' means to gain direct insight through applying the teachings in one's personal experience.

LUMINOSITY ('od gsal). A key term in Vajrayana philosophy, signifying a departure from Mahayana's over-emphasis on emptiness which can lead to nihilism. According to Mipham Rinpoche, 'luminosity' means 'free from the darkness of unknowing and endowed with the ability to cognize.'

MADHYAMIKA (dbu ma). The Middle Way. The highest of the four Buddhist schools of philosophy. The Middle Way means not holding any extreme views, especially those of eternalism or nihilism.

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MAHAMUDRA (phyag rgya chen po). Literally, the 'great seal,' the most direct practice for realizing one's buddha nature. A system of teachings which is the basic view of Vajrayana practice according to the Sarma or 'new' schools of Kagyü, Gelug, and Sakya.

MAHAYANA (theg pa chen po). 'Greater vehicle.' When using the term 'greater and lesser vehicles' (Mahayana and Hinayana) Mahayana includes the tantric vehicles while Hinayana is comprised of the teachings for shravakas and pratyekabuddhas. The connotation of 'greater' or 'lesser' refers to the scope of aspiration, the methods applied and the depth of insight.

MANDALA (dkyil 'khor). 1) 'Center and surrounding.' Usually a symbolic, graphic representation of a tantric deity's realm of existence. 2) An offering visualized as the entire universe, as well as the arrangement of the shrine in a tantric ritual.

MANTRA (sngags). 1) A synonym for Vajrayana. 2) A particular combination of sounds symbolizing and communicating the nature of a deity which lead to purification and realization; for example, Om mani padme hung. There are three chief types of mantra: guhya mantra, vidya mantra and dharani mantra.

MARPA (mar pa). The great forefather of the Kagyü lineage. See *Life of Marpa the Translator*, Shambhala Publications.

MEDITATION (sgom pa). In the context of Mahamudra or Dzogchen practice, meditation is the act of growing accustomed to or sustaining the continuity of the recognition of our buddha nature as pointed out by a qualified master. In the context of learning, contemplating and meditating, it means the act of assimilating the teachings into one's personal experience, growing accustomed to them through actual practice.

MENTAL BODY (yid kyi lus). An immaterial body formed of habitual tendencies, quite like the imagined physical form we have while dreaming.

MILAREPA (1040-1123). One of the most famous yogis and poets in Tibetan religious history. Much of the teachings of the Karma Kagyü schools passed through him. For

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more details read *The Life of Milarepa* and *The Hundred Thousand Songs of Milarepa*, Shambhala Publications.

MIND ESSENCE (sems nyid, sems ngo). The nature of mind, synonym for 'buddha nature.' It should be distinguished from 'mind' (sems), which refers to ordinary discursive thinking based on ignorance. 'Mind essence' is the basic space from and within which these thoughts take place.

MIND SECTION (sems sde). The first of the Three Sections of Dzogchen.

NADI (rtsa). The channels in the vajra body through which the energy currents move.

NALANDA (Skt.). The great monastic center for Buddhist studies which flourished in ancient India, situated in the present Indian state of Bihar.

NAROPA (na ro pa). The great mahasiddha of India, chief disciple of Tilopa and the guru of Marpa in the Kagyü Lineage. See *Rain of Wisdom*, Shambhala Publications.

NGÖNDRO (sngon 'gro). See 'preliminaries.'

NIRMANAKAYA (sprul sku). 'Emanation body,' 'form of magical apparition.' The third of the three kayas. The aspect of enlightenment that can be perceived by ordinary beings.

NONTHOUGHT (mi rtog). A state in which conceptual thinking is absent. It can refer to nonconceptual wakefulness but usually it is one of the three temporary meditation experiences (bliss, clarity and nonthought) that is often tainted by subtle fascination and attachment.

NYINGMA SCHOOL (rnying ma). The teachings brought to Tibet and translated mainly during the reign of King Trisong Deutsen and in the subsequent period up to Rinchen Sangpo in the ninth century, chiefly by the great masters Padmasambhava, Vimalamitra, Shantarakshita, and Vairochana. The two main types of transmission are Kama and Terma. Practices are based on both the Outer and Inner Tantras with emphasis on the practice of the Inner Tantras of Mahayoga, Anu Yoga and Ati Yoga.

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- OBSCURATION** (sgrib pa). The two veils of disturbing emotions and dualistic knowledge that cover one's buddha nature.
- OBSCURATION OF DISTURBING EMOTIONS** (nyon mongs pa'i sgrib pa). The emotions of the five poisons: anger, desire, stupidity, pride and envy.
- OBSCURATION OF DUALISTIC KNOWLEDGE** (shes bya'i sgrib pa). The subtle obscuration of holding on to the concepts of subject, object and action.
- ONE HUNDRED PEACEFUL AND WRATHFUL DEITIES.** (zhi khro'i lha brgya). The 42 peaceful and 58 wrathful deities representing the different qualities of the buddha nature. See 'peaceful and wrathful buddhas.'
- ORDINARY MIND** (tha mal gyi shes pa). Not the ordinary state of mind in an unenlightened person but 'ordinary' in the sense of one's present wakefulness not being fabricated, altered or corrected in any way.
- PANDITA** (mkhas pa). A learned master, scholar or professor in Buddhist philosophy.
- PEACEFUL AND WRATHFUL BUDDHAS** (zhi khro). The 42 peaceful buddhas: Samantabhadra and Samantabhadri, the 5 male and female buddhas, the 8 male and female bodhisattvas, the 6 munis, and the 4 male and female gatekeepers. The 58 wrathful buddhas: the 5 male and female herukas, the 8 yoginis, the 8 tramen goddesses, the 4 female gatekeepers, and the 28 shvaris.
- PHILOSOPHICAL SCHOOLS** (grub mtha'). The four Buddhist schools of thought are: Vaibhashika, Sautrantika, Chittamatra, and Madhyamika. The former two are Hinayana and the latter two Mahayana.
- PHOWA** ('pho ba). Ejection of consciousness to a buddhafield at the moment of death.
- POINTING-OUT INSTRUCTION** (ngo sprod). The direct introduction to the nature of mind.
- PRAJNA AND UPAYA** (thabs dang shes rab). Prajna is knowledge or intelligence; in particular, the knowledge of realizing egolessness. Upaya is the method or technique that brings about realization.

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- PRAJNAPARAMITA** (shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa). 'Transcendent knowledge.' The Mahayana teachings on insight into emptiness, transcending the fixation of subject, object and action. Associated with the Second Turning of the Wheel of Dharma.
- PRELIMINARIES** (sngon 'gro). The general outer preliminaries are the Four Mind Changings; the special inner preliminaries are the Four Times Hundred Thousand Practices of refuge and bodhichitta, Vajrasattva recitation, mandala offering, and guru yoga. See *Torch of Certainty*, Shambhala Publications, and *The Great Gate*, Rangjung Yeshe Publications.
- PRIMORDIAL PURITY** (ka dag). The basic nature of sentient beings which is originally untainted by defilement and beyond confusion and liberation.
- PURE REALM** (zhing khams, dag pa'i zhing). A realm inhabited entirely by enlightened bodhisattvas, where a buddha teaches in the sambhogakaya form.
- RAINBOW BODY** ('ja' lus). Passing away in a mass of rainbow light and leaving no corpse behind.
- RANGTONG** (rang stong). An aspect of the Madhyamika school in Tibet focusing on emptiness devoid of inherent existence. Compare with Shentong.
- READING TRANSMISSION** (lung). The transmission of authorization to study a scripture by listening to it being read aloud.
- REDNESS** (dmar lam). The second stage of the subtle dissolution stages of appearance, increase and attainment.
- RELATIVE TRUTH** (kun rdzob kyi bden pa). The seeming, superficial and deceptive aspect of reality. It is defined differently by the different philosophical schools.
- ROOT TEACHER** (rtsa ba'i bla ma). Root guru. A practitioner of Vajrayana can have several types of root guru: the vajra master who confers empowerment, who bestows reading transmission, or who explains the meaning of the tantras. The ultimate root guru is the master who gives the 'pointing-out instruction' so that one recognizes the nature of mind.

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- SAKYA** (sa skya). One of the four major schools of Tibetan Buddhism. It was established in the eleventh century by Drogmi Lotsawa ('brog mi lo tsa ba), a disciple of the Indian master Virupa.
- SAMADHI** (ting nge 'dzin). 'Adhering to the continuity of evenness.' A state of undistracted concentration or meditative absorption which in the context of Vajrayana can refer to either the development stage or the completion stage.
- SAMAYA** (dam tshig). The sacred pledges, precepts or commitments of Vajrayana practice. Samayas essentially consist of outwardly maintaining harmonious relationships with the vajra master and one's Dharma friends, and inwardly not straying from the continuity of the practice.
- SAMBHOGAKAYA** (longs spyod rdzogs pa'i sku). The 'body of perfect enjoyment.' In the context of the 'five kayas of fruition,' sambhogakaya is the semi-manifest form of the buddhas endowed with the 'five perfections' of perfect teacher, retinue, place, teaching and time which is perceptible only to bodhisattvas on the ten levels.
- SAMSARA** ('khor ba). 'Cyclic existence,' 'vicious circle' or 'round' of birth and death and rebirth within the six realms of existence, characterized by suffering, impermanence, and ignorance. The state of ordinary sentient beings fettered by ignorance and dualistic perception, karma and disturbing emotions. Ordinary reality, an endless cycle of frustration and suffering generated as the result of karma.
- SANGHA** (dge 'dun). The community of practitioners, usually the fully ordained monks and nuns. The Noble Sangha means those who have achieved the path of seeing among the five paths and therefore are liberated from samsara.
- SARAHA** (sa ra ha). One of the mahasiddhas of India and a master in the Mahamudra lineage. See *The Royal Songs of Saraha*, Shambhala Publications.
- SHAMATHA** (zhi gnas). 'Calm abiding' or 'remaining in quiescence' after thought activity has subsided; or, the meditative practice of calming the mind in order to rest free from the disturbance of thought.

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- SHARIPUTRA** (sha ri'i bu). One of the Buddha's two chief disciples, said to excel in wisdom.
- SHENTONG** (gzhan stong). An aspect of the Madhyamika School in Tibet focusing on emptiness indivisible from luminosity, asserting that the kayas and wisdoms of buddhahood are naturally present within the sugata essence.
- SHRAVAKA** (nyan thos). 'Hearer' or 'listener.' Hinayana practitioner of the First Turning of the Wheel of the Dharma on the four noble truths, who realizes the suffering inherent in samsara and focuses on understanding that there is no independent self. By conquering disturbing emotions he liberates himself, attaining first the stage of Stream Enterer at the Path of Seeing, followed by the stage of Once-Returner who will be reborn only one more time, and the stage of Non-returner who will no longer be reborn into samsara. The final goal is to become an Arhant. These four stages are also known as the 'four results of spiritual practice.'
- SHRI SINGHA** (Skt). The chief disciple and successor of Manjushrimitra in the lineage of the Dzogchen teachings. He was born in the city of Shokyam in Khotan and studied with the masters Hatibhala and Bhelakirti. Among Shri Singha's disciples were four outstanding masters: Jnanasutra, Vimalamitra, Padmasambhava and the Tibetan translator Vairochana.
- SINGLE SPHERE OF DHARMAKAYA** (chos sku thig le nyag cig). A symbolic description of dharmakaya being like a single sphere because it is devoid of duality and limitation and defies all 'edges' of conceptual constructs that could be formed about it.
- SIX PARAMITAS** (phar phyin drug). The six transcendent actions of generosity, discipline, patience, diligence, concentration, and discriminating knowledge.
- SIX REALMS** (rigs drug gi gnas). The worlds of gods, demigods, humans, animals, hungry ghosts, and hell beings.
- SIX RECOLLECTIONS** (rjes dran drug). There are different lists, of which the most appropriate is: Recollection of the yidam deity, the path, the place of rebirth, the meditative

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state, the oral instructions of the teacher, and the view. In his *Great Pointing-out Instruction of the Four Bardo States*, Padmasambhava mentions these recollections: "By remembering the yidam deity you behold the countenance of the peaceful and wrathful deities of the three kayas. By remembering the path you gain mastery over the innate nature in the bardo. By remembering the place of rebirth you are reborn in a nirmanakaya realm even though you may be of the inferior type of capacity. By remembering the meditation state you remain in meditation for five days. By remembering the master's oral instructions you realize that your personal experience is unimpeded wakefulness. By remembering the view you realize that the spontaneous presence is the mandala of sambhogakaya. Like meeting a person you already know, you recognize your natural face."

SPACE SECTION (klong sde). A division of Dzogchen emphasizing emptiness.

SUGATAGARBHA (bde bar gshegs pa'i snying po). 'Sugata essence.' The most common Sanskrit term for what in the West is known as 'buddha nature.'

SUTRA (mdo, mdo sde). 1) A discourse spoken or inspired by the Buddha. 2) A scripture of the Sutra Pitaka within the Tripitaka. 3) All exoteric teachings of Buddhism belonging to Hinayana and Mahayana, the causal teachings that regard the path as the cause of enlightenment, as opposed to the esoteric, tantric teachings.

TANTRA (rgyud). The Vajrayana teachings given by the Buddha in his sambhogakaya form. The real sense of tantra is 'continuity,' the innate buddha nature, which is known as the 'tantra of the expressed meaning.' The general sense of tantra is the extraordinary tantric scriptures also known as the 'tantra of the expressing words.' Can also refer to all the resultant teachings of Vajrayana as a whole.

TATHAGATA (de bzhin gshegs pa). 'Thus-gone.' Same as a fully enlightened buddha.

TEN BHUMIS (sa bcu). The ten levels of a noble bodhisattva's development into a fully enlightened buddha. On each stage more subtle defilements are purified and a further

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degree of enlightened qualities is manifested: The Joyous, the Stainless, the Radiant, the Brilliant, the Hard to Conquer, the Realized, the Reaching Far, the Unshakable, the Good Intelligence, and the Cloud of Dharma.

TEN NONVIRTUES (mi dge ba bcu). The physical misdeeds are killing, taking what is not given, and engaging in sexual misconduct. The verbal misdeeds are lying, uttering divisive talk, harsh words, and gossiping. The mental misdeeds are harboring covetousness, ill-will, and wrong views.

TEN VIRTUES (dge ba bcu). Generally, to refrain from the above ten nonvirtues. In particular, to engage in their opposites; for example, to save life, be generous, etc.

TERMA (gter ma). 'Treasure.' 1) The transmission through concealed treasures hidden, mainly by Guru Rinpoche and Yeshe Tsogyal, to be discovered at the proper time by a 'tertön,' a treasure revealer, for the benefit of future disciples. It is one of the two chief traditions of the Nyingma School, the other being 'Kama.' It is said this tradition will continue even long after the Vinaya of the Buddha has disappeared. 2) Concealed treasures of many different kinds, including texts, ritual objects, relics, and natural objects.

THATNESS (de bzhin nyid). The nature of phenomena and mind.

TÖGAL (thod rgal). 'Direct crossing.' Dzogchen has two main sections: Trekchö and Tögal. The former emphasizes primordial purity (ka dag) and the latter spontaneous presence (lhun grub).

THREE HIGHER REALMS (mtho ris gsum). The worlds of human beings, demigods or *asuras*, and gods or *devas*. These realms are more pleasant than the lower realms of animals, hungry ghosts and hell beings, but are not places of lasting happiness since even the highest realms of the gods are still within samsara.

THREE KAYAS (sku gsum). Dharmakaya, sambhogakaya and nirmanakaya. The three kayas as ground are 'essence, nature, and function'; as path they are 'bliss, clarity and nonthought,' and as fruition they are the 'three kayas of buddhahood.' The three kayas of buddhahood are the

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dharmakaya, which is free from elaborate constructs and endowed with the 'twenty-one sets of enlightened qualities;' the sambhogakaya, which is of the nature of light and endowed with the perfect major and minor marks perceptible only to bodhisattvas; and the nirmanakaya, which manifests in forms perceptible to both pure and impure beings.

THREE KINDS OF MIRACULOUS POWERS (cho 'phrul gsum). The perfect deeds of a nirmanakaya buddha enacted through his body, speech and mind.

THREE MIND POISONS (dug gsum). Attachment, anger, and delusion.

THREE ROOTS (rtsa ba gsum). Guru, Yidam and Dakini. The Guru is the root of blessings, the Yidam of accomplishment, and the Dakini of activity.

THREE SAMADHIS (ting nge 'dzin gsum). The samadhi of suchness, of illumination and of the seed-syllable. They form the framework for the development stage.

TILOPA (Skt.). Indian mahasiddha, the guru of Naropa and father of the Kagyü lineage.

TRANSCENDENT KNOWLEDGE (shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa, prajnaparamita). Intelligence that transcends conceptual thinking. 'Transcendent' literally means 'gone to the other shore' in the sense of having departed from 'this shore' of dualistic concepts.

TREKCHÖ (khregs chod). 'Cutting through' the stream of delusion, the thoughts of the three times, by revealing naked awareness devoid of dualistic fixation. To recognize this view through the oral instructions of one's master and to sustain it uninterruptedly throughout all aspects of life is the very essence of Dzogchen practice.

TWELVE ASPECTS OF EXCELLENT SPEECH (gsung rab yan lag bcu gnyis). The twelve main divisions of the Buddhist Canon: General Discourses (mdo sde); Proclamations in Song (dbyangs su bsnyad pa); Prophecies (lung du bstan pa); Poetic Pronouncements (tshigs su bcad pa); Special Aphorisms (mched du brjod pa); Declarations (gleng gzhi); Narratives (rtogs pa brjod pa); Parables (de lta bu byung ba); Succession of Former Lives (skyes pa'i rabs);

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Extensive Sayings (shin tu rgyas pa'i sde); Marvels (rmad du byung ba); Established Doctrines (gtan la dbab pa).

TWELVE LINKS OF DEPENDENT ORIGATION (rten cing 'brel bar 'byung ba). The twelve-fold cycle of causal connections which binds beings to samsaric existence and thus perpetuates suffering: ignorance (ma rig pa) gives rise to karmic formations ('du byed), which gives rise to consciousness (rnam par shes pa), which gives rise to name and form (ming dang gzugs), which give rise to the six sense bases (skye mched drug), and so on through contact (reg pa), ('tshor ba), craving (sred pa), grasping (nye bar len pa), becoming (srid pa), birth (skye ba), and old age and death (rga shi). See also 'dependent origination.'

TWO ACCUMULATIONS (tshogs gnyis). The accumulation of merit with concepts and the accumulation of wisdom beyond concepts.

TWO TRUTHS (bden pa gnyis). Relative truth and ultimate truth. Relative truth describes the seeming, superficial and apparent mode of all things. Ultimate truth describes the real, true and unmistaken mode. These two aspects of reality are defined by the Four Philosophical Schools as well as the tantras of Vajrayana in different ways, each progressively deeper and closer to describing things as they are.

ULTIMATE TRUTH (don dam pa'i bden pa). The absolute nature of relative truth; that all phenomena are beyond arising, dwelling and ceasing.

UPAYA (thabs). See 'prajna and upaya.'

VAIROCHANA (Skt.). The great and unequalled translator during the reign of King Trisong Deutsen. Among the first seven Tibetan monks, he was sent to India to study with Shri Singha. Along with Padmasambhava and Vimalamitra, he was one of the three main masters to bring the Dzogchen teachings to Tibet.

VAJRA (rdo rje). 'Diamond,' 'king of stones.' As an adjective it means indestructible, invincible. The conventional vajra is the ritual implement of material substance; the ultimate vajra is emptiness.

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- VAJRAYANA** (rdo rje theg pa). The 'vajra vehicle.' The practices of taking the result as the path. Same as 'Secret Mantra.'
- VICTORIOUS ONES** (rgyal ba, jina). Same as buddhas.
- VIDYADHARA** (rig pa 'dzin pa). 'Knowledge-holder.' Holder (dhara) or bearer of knowledge (vidya) mantra. A realized master on one of the four stages of the tantric path of Mahayoga, the tantric equivalent of the eleven bodhisattva levels. Another definition is bearer of the profound method, the knowledge which is the wisdom of deity, mantra and great bliss.
- VIKRAMASHILA** (Skt.). A famous monastic institution in ancient India.
- VINAYA** ('dul ba). 'Discipline.' One of the three parts of the Tripitaka. The Buddha's teachings showing ethics, the discipline and moral conduct that is the foundation for all Dharma practice for both lay and ordained people.
- WHITENESS** (dkar lam). The first stage of the subtle dissolution stages of appearance, increase, and attainment.
- WISDOM OF KNOWING THE NATURE AS IT IS** (gnas lugs ji lta ba mkhyen pa'i ye shes). The knowledge which cognizes the nature of phenomena.
- WISDOM OF PERCEIVING ALL THAT EXISTS** (shes bya ji snyed pa gzig pa'i ye shes). The knowledge which cognizes conventional phenomena.
- WRATHFUL DEITIES** (lha khro bo). Buddhas and bodhisattvas appearing in wrathful forms in order to tame what cannot be overcome by peaceful means.
- YANGTI** (yang ti). A subdivision of the Instruction Section of Dzogchen emphasizing the unique key points.
- YIDAM** (yi dam). A personal deity and the root of accomplishment among the Three Roots. The yidam is the personal protector of one's practice and guide to enlightenment. Traditionally, yidam practice is the main practice that follows the preliminaries. It includes the two stages of development and completion and is a perfect bridge to approaching the more subtle practices of Mahamudra and Dzogchen. Later on, yidam practice is the perfect enhancement for the view of these subtle practices.

The highest and most profound level of Buddhist practice, the Vajrayana categorizes existence as an endless cycle of experience called the four bardos. These four periods include our present life, the process of dying, the after-death experience, and the quest for a new rebirth.

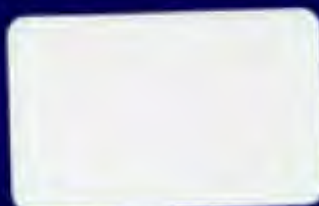
Drawing from his intimate knowledge of the innermost Vajrayana teachings, the Tibetan master Chökyi Nyima Rinpoche presents in *The Bardo Guidebook* straightforward, direct instructions on how to deal with the four bardos. Having taught students from many nations for the last fifteen years, Rinpoche is adept at integrating the profundity of Tibetan Buddhism with a modern Western perspective. Chökyi Nyima Rinpoche is also the author of *The Union of Mahamudra and Dzogchen*, published by Rangjung Yeshe Publications.

"Please understand that this book is not merely a description of the bardo states. It is a guidebook on how to practice in this life and the next."

Chökyi Nyima Rinpoche



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